The Ship That Turned Aside

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CHAPTER I

The Lights in the Sky

We saw the lights our first evening out from New York. They grew in splendor until, for three of us, the voyage ended. For the others, they may still move sometimes in the sky. They have never been explained, not even by Pretloe, who found some reason for every other fantastic thing that happened.

Standing by the rail after dinner that first night, I watched them. The sea was a little rough, but most of our passengers were veterans. Nobody had retired except one old lady. We stood along the rail or walked about the deck, speaking to each other occasionally with that shyness peculiar to people who meet for the first time on board a ship—especially a small ship—the first day out. The man beside me was Pretloe, but I didn't know that then.

"Curious," he said. "They don't look like an ordinary display." I noted his soft, precise voice, and his traveler's accent—that slightly foreign but indistinguishable trick of speech which marks a linguist. I said:

"I've never seen the aurora borealis. I don't know why I haven't."

"I have," he said, "and it's different—not so definite as this." He pointed out to me the peculiarities of these lights. They lay in a narrow band across the sky, diagonal to our course but far down toward the east. They appeared very bright, and they had a sort of motion which couldn't be determined so far away. It became more evident during the next day or so, as we approached them. At first it was only a slight twinkling, such as stars appear to have. The lights didn't move. They looked more like the lights of a city the first night, and I heard passengers speculating as they went by, talking of zeppelins and floating cities.

Later on I tired of the lights. I took a few turns around the deck, and then went to my cabin. My companion was still watching, with a thoughtful expression, when I left.

The sea was rougher the next day, and rose perceptibly as night came on. There was little wind, though, and the sky seemed to be serene. After supper, we went up and found the lights there again. They were closer tonight, and still directly in our path. None of us were worried, naturally, but we were curious. I watched them, alone, for some hours. I saw the man I had spoken to the night before, but he was immersed in his own thoughts.

The fourth night out we ran into the storm. The sea had been rising steadily, and tonight it was becoming actually dangerous. The ship pitched and rolled with difficulty through heavy seas that drenched the decks. We looked at the sky through occasional showers of spray. But the wind was still very moderate, and stars were visible at times through the dark, thin clouds that raced across the sky. It was as though the sea had been thrown into confusion by some curious and magnificent struggle going on far under its surface.

The lights were nearly overhead, and very bright. Tonight they were clear and distinct. They didn't touch the horizon. They seemed to appear out of nothingness down the sky in the south, and arched up to their most brilliant point over us, ahead. Then they went down again into nothingness to the north and east. It was oddly difficult to follow them at their ends, where they disappeared. It was as if they lost themselves in the distance, converging together; but whenever I tried to see where they ended, my eyes would return automatically to their center, overhead.

I met Pretloe again. I had not seen him during the day since we left port, except at meals. We were at different tables: he had his meals with the Captain. Tonight we were alone on deck. I had come up because I have a thoroughly disreputable preference for rough weather. Pretloe was watching the lights. I spoke to him, and he nodded. After awhile he said:

"Do you notice how immovable those bands are? They seem to be fixed in the sky. They don't change position with the stars."

"I hadn't thought of that," I said. "Astronomy's not my line." Again he nodded.

"You see my point, though. And they're too sharply defined—more like physical objects in the sky than like bands of light."

I had noticed that. They had a certain rotundity, a perceptible effect of depth. They looked like long rods of a strange metal, heated white hot, and foreshortened by some indeterminable optical illusion. I could count an even dozen such rods. They appeared to be hundreds of miles overhead, but the clouds avoided them, thinning and dying out as they passed beneath. For the first time I had a vague feeling that something unknown and important was impending.

"You see that rod-like effect?" Pretloe was saying. I nodded. 'I've had the impression for half an hour that they're turning over and over, very slowly, as on axes. Doesn't it seem so to you?"

I watched awhile, intently.

“I think I know what you mean,” I said.

“Of course it may be only an illusion,” Pretloe added.

We discussed the lights and watched them for several hours, until I found myself suddenly shivering with cold, and wet through to my skin. I turned away regretfully.

“This won’t do,” I said. “I’ll have pneumonia if I don’t go to my cabin.” Pretloe retired a little to the shelter of a boat.

“I think I’ll wait awhile,” he said. “These lights have fascinated me.”

I nodded good night to him, and left. It was hard even to move along the deck, with the ship tossing so. We had been issued life belts, but I didn’t bother to put mine on. I got to bed with difficulty, and finally fell into a troubled sleep.

Hours later I sat up, suddenly awake. The ship was creaking and trembling and rocking in a confused medley of noise and motion. My trunk had come loose, and was pitching about the cabin in the midst of falling clothes and toilet articles. A brilliant bluish light streamed in through the port hole, lighting the cabin weirdly. My skin seemed to tingle and jump as if it were charged with electricity.

I rose hastily, snatched up my life belt, and ran out on deck. Most of the passengers were already there, comparatively quiet. I think they must have been overawed by the colossal majesty of the spectacle. The ship plunged desperately in the midst of the wildest sea I had ever encountered. Spray swept across the sky high over us, and from time to time waves battered against the side thunderously, rushing across the decks. There was obviously no possibility of launching a boat. Yet the little ship seemed to be holding its own somehow. The whole ocean surged about us with a strange appearance of lightness which we shared, riding it as though all at once gravity had been partly suspended.

The lights blazed above us. directly overhead. A bluish brilliance filled the sky and hovered about the ship and on the surface of the water. The ship quivered with it, and our bodies, the water, every object on deck seemed to be charged with electricity. There was an exhilaration in it for even the most alarmed spectators.

But nothing happened. After about an hour, the sea grew visibly quieter. The lights overhead dimmed a little, and the electric tension gradually diminished. A few stolid spirits went back to bed, and most of the women retired with obvious reluctance. The officers moved about on deck, assuring us that the worst was over, promising to have us called if anything more happened. I stayed on deck to watch.

After awhile the sky grew paler, and the lights began to fade. I noticed that they had changed position and were now stretched, as well as I could see through the spray, from horizon to horizon, even and parallel, along our course—unless we had lost our course in the confusion. The sky was clouding over. The dawn, when it came, was gray and cold—sunless. I went back to my cabin at last for a few more hours of sleep.

CHAPTER II

An Uncharted Sea

There were few of us at breakfast that morning. There was an empty place at the Captain's table, and I took it. I wanted to hear his opinion of what had happened. He appeared haggard and sleepless, but shaven and neatly dressed as usual. After a brief greeting, he took his place and fell into a profound meditation which lasted until the meal was half finished. Then he shook his head slightly, and looked up. I suppose he felt that he must not neglect us.

"Mr. Pretloe," he said, addressing my fellow watcher of the past few nights, whose name I learned now for the first time, "what is your opinion of what happened this morning? You are a scientist."

"It's not my field precisely," Pretloe said thoughtfully'. "I'm inclined to wonder whether any scientist could honestly have an opinion."

"What do you mean?"

"When we left New York, nothing was known of any such phenomenon in the sky, or I should have heard of it. It appeared our first night out, and it seems to have been connected definitely with the storm. Did you have any message from the shore?" The Captain frowned.

"None at all. We mentioned the lights in a report, but received no answer."

"And have had none this morning?"

"Unfortunately," said the Captain, "the radio is not working this morning." We stared at him, and he hastened to add, "Oh, it can't be anything serious—some minor electrical disturbance. As soon as we have it in order there's sure to be some explanation."

But Pretloe looked skeptical.

The radio remained silent. Although it was apparently unharmed, all the messages we tried to send seemed to fade out as they left the instrument; and nothing whatever could be heard in the receiver except a very faint noise like static from time to time. Eventually even that faded, and the sending apparatus ceased to work at all.

The day was dark, until late in the afternoon. I walked around the deck with Pretloe. The sea was subsiding rapidly, but there was no sign of the sun anywhere. A perpetual twilight obscured the sea, and there were lights in the saloon.

About noon, I happened to glance up and saw the Captain looking helplessly at his sextant. His eye caught mine, and he saw Pretloe. He beckoned for us to come up. As we approached, he came forward anxiously, and spoke to Pretloe.

“Mr. Pretloe,” he said, “I don’t want anything said to the other passengers about this, but I need your help,”

“What’s the trouble, Captain Weeks?”

“I can’t find our course. There’s not even a trace of the sun anywhere.”

“But isn’t the compass working?” said Pretloe.

“The needle just turns idly. None of the compasses arc in order. All our electrical apparatus has been disturbed. Haven’t you noticed how dim the lights are? Something is happening to our current.”

“Can’t your people find the trouble?”

“There doesn’t seem to be any trouble, except that nothing will work. My officers are worried to death. And I’ve no idea which way we’re headed.” He brought his fist down with nervous vexation against the rail. “It’s uncanny,” he muttered.

Pretloe said he’d take a look around.

“I doubt if I can help much,” he added. “Your men probably know more about electrical apparatus than I do. You can get your bearings, of course, whenever the sky clears.”

“If it ever does clear,” said Captain Weeks, looking gloomily up toward the supposed place of the invisible sun.

Pretloe found nothing. I spent the afternoon reading. I dismissed the Captain’s troubles as

purely temporary. I wasn't in any hurry to get abroad. About sunset time, I looked up and saw Pretloe. The sky had practically cleared, and it was brighter than it had been at noon.

"Mr. Burton," Pretloe said. I rose, glad to have his company. But he was frowning anxiously, and went on. "Isn't it time for sunset by your watch?" I glanced at my wrist.

"The sun went down at six-thirty last night," I said. "I noticed particularly. It's six-fifteen now."

"And practically clear."

"Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing, except that there's not a sign of the sun anywhere."

"What?"

"The sun has completely disappeared." For a moment I was stunned. Then I grinned.

"But my dear fellow ! That's ridiculous !" I said. Pretloe smiled wryly.

"You can look for yourself," he said.

I circled the ship with him. He was right. It was clear now; the sky was blue, with the faint tints of red that come at sunset. There was no sound anywhere but the throbbing of the engines: the special silence of twilight was approaching.

"But it's impossible, Mr. Pretloe," I protested. "I didn't mean to doubt you, but—why, I'm no astronomer, as I've told you, but even at that I know that anything happening to the sun would involve the earth too."

"You can see, though—it's gone," said Pretloe.

"Our clocks are wrong?"

"But it's daylight. We've had daylight for nearly an hour—full daylight, nearly clear. We haven't seen the sun. If it had gone down before the sky cleared, it would be dark now."

I thought dazedly. Dozens of fantastic ideas suggested themselves.

"Could we by any improbable means have gotten into the Arctic regions?"

“We’d still see the sun so long as there was daylight.”

“Couldn’t a mirage of some sort do it?”

“None that I have ever heard of. And notice—” he pointed to the deck, “even a mirage that would deceive the eye, if a mirage like this is conceivable, could hardly interfere with the physical laws of light. And there are no shadows.”

I followed his pointing finger. I cast no shadow on the deck, nor did Pretloe, nor did any of the chairs. The softest artificial arrangement of lights could not so completely have eliminated even the suggestion of a shadow.

Pretloe had just left the Captain. They had found no explanation. The Captain was waiting eagerly for a look at the stars. He didn’t come to supper, and neither Pretloe nor I mentioned the impossible phenomenon of the sun’s disappearance. The other passengers, for some reason, had observed nothing.

After supper we went on deck. Both Pretloe and I glanced up at the sky as we emerged into the open. It was nearly dark. Already several stars were faintly visible overhead. The light disappeared rapidly, and the stars came out one by one. It was a clear night.

I looked at Pretloe, and laughed with relief and amusement.

“Well, there they are,” I said. “We shall find our course after all.” And, for the first time, I realized how completely helpless we should have been if the stars also had disappeared.

“Will you come up with me to see Captain Weeks? I want to be sure he’s satisfied.” Pretloe said.

We found Captain Weeks on the bridge. He was looking up at the stars, motionless.

“Well, Captain,” Pretloe said, “I suppose you’ve sighted your course all right by now?”

The Captain turned his head toward us slowly, as if he hadn’t heard.

“Eh?” he said tonelessly.

“Have you found the course again?”

“No.” The Captain turned. He looked at us fixedly in the dark.

“What’s that?” I said, not understanding. “Aren’t the stars enough?” He shook his head.

“No,” he said again. “Look at them.”

We looked up at the stars obediently. They looked all right to me. But Pretloe, after a moment, exclaimed softly,

“My God!” I turned to him helplessly.

“What is it?” I said. “I don’t understand.”

“Do you realize,” said Pretloe, “that there’s not a known constellation in the sky?”

CHAPTER III

Pretloe’s Theory

Later that night the sinking lights had faded until they were nearly extinguished. Pretloe and I had been observed with Captain Weeks on the bridge. A group of passengers came up to us on deck to ask about the lights. Pretloe seemed a little at a loss what to say, but I explained:

“All the ship’s electrical equipment has been disturbed by the storm this morning. I suppose the men will have it in shape again before long.”

One middle-aged man, stout and red-faced, whom I had met earlier in the voyage and taken a drink or two with, said protestingly:

“But good Lord, Burton, how are we to get around without lights?”

“I’ll speak to Captain Weeks about it,” I said. And that is how I became, along with Pretloe, an official ambassador to the Captain and a member of his immediate group.

We saw him later. He had just sent officers in search of candles provided for just such an emergency. The three of us, Captain Weeks, Pretloe, and myself, gathered in the Captain’s cabin for a discussion.

“Mr. Pretloe,” the Captain said, “there’s only one man on board who can make even a pretense of explaining what’s happened today. You’re the man.” Pretloe shook his head.

“I’m afraid there’s not even one man who can explain it, Captain,” he said. “I’ve only one

vague idea that could in any even faintly conceivable way account for these phenomena."

"What is it?"

"It's too impossible to mention. You'll laugh at me."

"My dear sir," the Captain said impatiently, "you haven't seen me laughing at the disappearance of the sun. Nor at the sudden discovery of some ten thousand new stars in the sky. If you've any idea at all about this, I want to hear it."

At that moment an officer arrived with candles for our cabin, which was nearly in darkness. Switching off the useless lights, Captain Weeks lit two of them and put them on the table. He gave orders that they were to be issued sparingly. There was no assurance that our lights would return before we reached port. Then he went to a cupboard and brought out a bottle, glasses, and some Seltzer water.

"Here's whisky if you want it, gentlemen," he said. And he went on, in a gloomy voice. "You see, don't you, how absolutely helpless I feel? I'm certain that we lost our course in the storm —you remember how those lights seemed to swing around? I've put the ship back on a course as nearly as possible what it should be if we have lost it in that manner. The lights lay approximately northeast and a little north. I'm sure we didn't turn completely about. So if we did turn, we must have ended on a northeast course. We should now be following a course that will take us a little south of England—to be on the safe side. If we didn't change, then we're headed for the Mediterranean and Africa.

"But I've no assurance," he added, "that we're headed toward Europe or Africa at all. All I can do is pick out certain of the new stars and hold a course by them, wherever it takes us to. Our stores can't last indefinitely. Unless we sight land more or less on time, I'll have to say something to the men and the passengers. I see grave trouble ahead of us."

Pretloe nodded.

"I've already reasoned most of that out as you put it," he said.

"And your theory?"

Pretloe paused a moment. Then he said. "You've heard of the fourth dimension?"

The Captain grew visibly paler. He nodded.

"It's theoretically possible that if some cataclysm had turned us aside into a fourth dimension we should no longer be able to see the sun or any known stars."

“But—” The Captain knit his brows, and thought for a moment. “I see,” he said. “It sounds like madness. But the whole thing seems like madness.” I was thinking too.

“But look here, Mr. Pretloe,” I said, “isn’t the weakness in your theory the same weakness you found in mine? How about the daylight?”

“Not necessarily,” Pretloe said. “There are innumerable theories about the fourth dimension. But put it this way. Suppose the whole of our terrestrial phenomena took place in a thin section of the four dimensional universe. All our senses are fitted to perceive only in three directions. Then, if we got out of the section in Which we belonged, we could no longer see the sun. But, so long as no actual obstruction existed between our portion and the rest of the universe, there would still be sunlight. The sun would be there still, but out of our line of vision.”

“But how about shadows—if the sun were still there? You said ”

“I know. But the sun would cast a shadow also invisible to us. Look at it this way. Suppose, again, that we all lived on the earth’s equator, and that everything on either side of the equator were invisible to us. Now, if an earthquake, say, tossed us a mile or so away from the equator, the sun would no longer be in our two dimensional line of vision (provided the sun strictly followed the equator) and it would cast just such an invisible shadow.”

“That’s clear enough,” Captain Weeks said.

“Yes,” I objected, “but wouldn’t it be simple enough to turn around and go back again? Couldn’t we just turn the ship toward the course we were following, and get back on it?”

Pretloe smiled.

“How would you go about it?” he asked. “In the one case, you would have no perception of a third dimension—all you could do would be to go on walking in a straight line for the rest of your life. In the other case—our case—the same principle applies. How are we to steer a course through the fourth dimension? We have neither senses nor instruments capable of pointing the way.”

“If it was possible to get here, it must be possible to get back?”

“Theoretically, yes. But we’d have to learn how. It might take a cultured civilization having all facilities for research, hundreds of years to find that out. We have no such facilities.”

“Consider this, too. If our equatorial man had landed facing northeast, he’d have had only to

turn around, as you suggest, and retrace his steps to walk into the equator again. But he wouldn't know how to turn around or to deviate from a straight line. However, he could keep on walking until he encircled the globe. In that way he'd also get back. But he'd meet with a few difficult seas to cross.

"From the way those lights looked, I'm inclined to think they must have veered off at an angle somehow into the fourth dimension. In that case, no matter how we steer our course with regard to our own three dimensions, provided we have kept to our original direction in the fourth (and whether we do or not is beyond our control or knowledge), we have left our civilization some hundreds of miles behind us since the storm this morning. We don't know how to turn around, since that involves leaving temporarily our three dimensions.

"Theoretically, again, by continuing as we have started (providing always that the earth has a rotundity similar in the fourth dimension to its rotundity in the other three) we should in time come back to our starting point. This idea requires that we completely discard the Einstein theory of the fourth dimension, although in effect it comes to much the same thing. But there are probably obstructions as obvious as those which would face our equatorial man—seas, mountains, possibly variations in temperature, and certainly a loss of all sunlight for a time, as in our Arctic regions."

I nodded, my head whirling a little.

"I see that all right," I said.

I got up and poured myself a drink.

"Won't you have one, Captain?" But Captain Weeks shook his head. "Pretloe?"

"I'll have one," Pretloe said.

I made the drinks and sat down again, swallowing mine gratefully.

Captain Weeks cleared his throat.

"Your theory sounds plausible, Mr. Pretloe," he said. "Does it account for everything?" Pretloe smiled—coldly and quite collectedly.

"I don't claim that it does," he said. "I see nothing that renders it invalid, although it may ignore some things."

"How about those bands of light?"

“I don’t pretend to explain those, Captain Weeks. It seemed to me that they were too regular, too—well, too nice looking to be quite natural. But they might be some normally rare natural phenomenon we’ve never come up against before. Or they might be the work of a secret experimenter. That’s a wild idea, of course. Again, though, they might even be the work of a scientist in some civilization unknown to us, outside of our portion of the universe. I have no explanation for them. I doubt whether we shall ever find one.”

“They seemed quite thoroughly visible,” I said. “How would they have looked if they had crossed our course in the fourth dimension?”

“Frankly, I don’t know. You remember how they faded off at the ends? I feel sure that they went into the fourth dimension at those points, if there’s anything to my hypothesis. Except for that, I can’t say.”

It was growing late. I glanced at the clock.

“ ‘See here,” I said, “you didn’t sleep last night, did you, Captain?”

“No, I’m afraid I didn’t,” he said.

“We’d better go, then. We’re in your hands, you know. You are automatically our leader, no matter what happens or what dangers we have to go through. You’d better get some sleep. Pretloe and I can talk to you again about this tomorrow.”

The Captain nodded with a faint smile.

“I suppose you’re right,” he said. “I feel pretty helpless at the moment, but there’s nothing to do but go ahead as we’re going now until something turns up.” He rose, and shook hands with us. “You’ve been a great help to me, both of you. I want you to come up as often as possible and talk things over.”

Pretloe nodded.

“We’ll be a sort of cabinet if you like,” he said.

We took our leave, and went down to our cabins.

“It’s strange, isn’t it,” Pretloe said as he left me, “that the stars look quite as natural as they ever looked before?” I agreed ruefully.

“The one thing I’ve noticed about life,” I said, “is that the most fantastic things that ever happen to a man seem fairly normal at the time. It takes a poet or a writer of reminiscences

to appreciate romance."

CHAPTER IV

The Strange Coast

We had almost no trouble with the passengers. The ship's officers, of course, noticed quickly the disappearance of the familiar stars. We explained Pretloe's theory to Mr. Grady, the first mate, and he took care of the others. One or two members of the crew seemed to know what had happened, but Mr. Grady silenced them in time, and the rest remained as much in ignorance as the passengers. Most seamen, nowadays, are like skilled mechanics on land. They know thoroughly their own work. They may have idle speculations about life, but they are incurious. They are so accustomed to the sky that they never really see it. Many of them can't name more than two or three constellations, and those they never look for.

Both sailors and passengers, when they realized the disappearance of the sun and the moon, went wild with speculation. At first they were uneasy. Some were superstitious, and prophesied terrible events—another flood, or the end of the world. But superstition, too, is nearly dead even among sailors. After the first few days everyone was accustomed to the strange phenomena. Nothing happened. The sea was blue and serene, day after day. Nothing disturbed the silence of the cool, dark nights.

We met no ships. For the first time in many years I was able to recapture the expanding loneliness of the sea that had overwhelmed me so during my first crossings. I knew now, as I had felt then, that we were lost in a world from which, for all I could tell, the land had sunk down and disappeared, leaving only an endless waste of ocean, rising and falling with the tides, moving in unending long waves before the wind. There was a sort of peace, as well as a sort of dread, in knowing that we might never again come to land—that we might sail on into the east until a final twilight closed about us with a sea still quiet, still murmuring absently to itself, as it went by alongside of our rails.

We were due in Liverpool ten days after we left New York Harbor. The tenth day arrived without any sight of land, but Captain Weeks gave out the explanation that, due to the storm we had weathered, we had been delayed possibly several days. A few passengers grumbled, but that was all. Monday afternoon—the eleventh day—Pretloe and I were closeted with the Captain in his cabin.

"You see, gentlemen," he was saying, "this is our dilemma. We have considerable stores of food, but they will not last indefinitely. And so long as we are concealing from the passengers what seems to be our real situation, we can't put them on rations—that would

alarm them, and force our hand. And the candles are running low. If they have to spend their evenings on a dark ship, Lord knows what ideas will come into their heads. I've found from experience that men are still primitive enough to feel uneasy in the dark."

We agreed, and he went on.

"If we don't sight land—some sort of land—within a day or so, we're going to have trouble."

"True enough," said Pretloe. "And do you expect to sight land?"

"Well, what do you think?"

"I see no assurance that we shall. On the other hand, I see no assurance that we shouldn't—sooner or later.

If the ocean extends out into the fourth dimension on either side of what we called the world, it seems reasonable to suppose that the land does too. But we don't know our course, and we don't know at all how the land lies outside of our world. We may sight land today or tomorrow, we may sight it next week, or we may never sight it."

Captain Weeks nodded grimly.

"We have no data to go on. We know our own world, but not this one."

"Precisely," Pretloe said. "We can make certain assumptions. Others we can't make."

"Do you think there's any chance that this world is inhabited?" I asked.

"There's no way we can tell yet. There's no evidence of habitation."

"But your opinion?" said Captain Weeks. Pretloe shrugged.

"I doubt it. My opinion is that there must be something peculiar about our own stratum of the earth which renders it habitable. Otherwise, it appears to me that we should not be confined to such a thin three dimensional slice of what must be a vast, rich globe."

"What do you suppose that peculiarity could be?"

"It might be anything—perhaps something of which we are not even aware," Pretloe said. "We don't know what forces are operating on us in this waste land we have wandered into. Personally, I am inclined to suspect that the sun has something to do with it."

“The sun?” I exclaimed. “But how?”

“You know how necessary its light is to all plant and animal life. And you’ve seen plants turning their flowers and stems toward the sun as it moves across the sky during the day. It might be some instinctive attraction such as that.

“Our species originated most probably, you know, in the hot areas around the equator—under the sun. And it’s still true that the hottest regions are the most densely populated. Then consider, too, how the ancient peoples all worshipped the sun, with rites and symbolisms that survive even now in our various church rituals, in our dream symbolisms, even in our subconscious daily motives and desires. Nobody has ever explained or understood fully the intense, varied, and mystic significances that the sun held for primitive peoples. Perhaps there was more to it than we realize—some definite and important kinship of animal life with the sun’s path.”

“And you think,” I said, “that civilization has evolved in that narrow stratum because man needed the sun’s occult influence?”

“Occult only in that we may not understand it entirely,” Pretloe corrected me. “It seems probable enough that, because the sun is so necessary to us. our evolution has kept us in that one stratum and taken away from us any faculties which would have made us aware of these other reaches in the fourth dimension. Not needing any knowledge of them, we have, by the economy of nature, been left without the means of perceiving them. And it is possible that, if we should ever find a way of exploring into the fourth dimension, we shall evolve senses with which to understand it.”

“How can you account, though,” I said, “for the fact that our mechanical inventions—automobiles, ships, and so on—remain in our stratum with such docility? They have no instincts.”

“For one thing,” said Pretloe, “we keep them there. They work under our guidance. Again, too, if we could look at our world and our machines from an enlarged point of view that included a knowledge of the fourth dimension and its laws, we might find that there were other facts which made mechanics—at least our sort of mechanics—peculiar to our world. You remember that our lights have gone off, and the radio stopped working? That in itself is evidence that electricity must be nonexistent outside of our world—unless there are other kinds of electricity unknown to us.

“I imagine that magnetism and electricity—about which, you know, we understand comparatively little except that they are related to each other—may be related also to the sun and the sun’s path. It is not difficult to believe that the sun, following for millions of

years one path around the earth in the fourth dimension, may in some way have affected it—magnetized it, so to speak—and given it the properties which make radio and electrical phenomena possible. It might be some such process, too, which gave us our metals with which to create machines. There may be no metals beyond our stratum. And it may be some such magnetism which creates a band of attraction to keep our ships and tools from blundering out of the world. All this is pure speculation, of course. But we haven't anything to work with except our speculations."

"True enough," said the Captain. "I remember "

I don't know what he was remembering or what he would have said. At that moment there was a hasty rap on the door, and Mr. Grady, the mate, burst in. Breaking off with his remark, Captain Weeks turned and said:

"What is it, Mr. Grady?"

"We've just sighted land, sir."

"What!" The Captain leaped up, and Pretloe and I followed. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

We went out on the bridge. Captain Weeks examined the horizon carefully and then handed us his glasses. It was land, a long, flat line of blue, lying south east of us. We watched it in silence for a while, absorbed in our speculations.

"Do you suppose it can be—?" Captain Weeks asked. But Pretloe shook his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid not, Captain Weeks," he said. "It may be inhabited, but I doubt whether it's any coast we've ever seen before." The Captain thought a moment. Then he looked at us soberly.

"This is our crisis, then," he said. "We'll have to tell tire passengers. And the crew."

"Yes." I glanced down at the people promenading on the deck. They hadn't seen the land yet. They thought they were bound for Liverpool, to carry on their private businesses and pleasures, in which each of them was absorbed, enfolded and shut off like a chrysalis in its shell—a private world of his own. For most people the shell never opens except in death. These promenaders, perhaps, had counted the possibility of death as an unforetellable hazard of their voyage; but even death they had not imagined, because men never think of death as a reality. Now they were to face something more than death—a new life, the

opening of the shell. From the moment when they should find themselves on land again, they would be no longer John Bealy, the lawyer, and Rudolph Cortez, the master of jazz, and Alicia Corey, the designer of dresses. They would be actors cast in new roles, on a new stage. Nobody, not even themselves, could tell what they might become.

It was nearing twilight.

"We'll wait," Captain Weeks said. "Later on tonight we'll make for the coast. Tomorrow morning they'll wake and see it. Morning's the best time. We'll tell them then—after breakfast."

We went to supper, hiding our tense expectancy. Nobody observed that we had slackened speed to a bare few knots. We went to supper by candle light.

CHAPTER V

Jamestown, Leaguoa

I rose early, a long while before the other passengers, and went on deck. There we were, as Captain Weeks had promised us, cruising along the coast. The land rose abruptly out of the water, and out of little strips of sandy beach. It was a rocky coast, moderately high for the most part, occasionally dropping down toward the water's edge to form a small cove or a length of beach. It showed no signs of human life. There were trees, though, and bushes beyond the sand and at the top of the cliffs. Some distance back a forest began, rising gently to the summit of a low line of hills some miles inland. It was not a very picturesque coast. It looked as if there might be fertile soil on the slopes of the hills. There was something utterly simple and inviting about it. The sea was quite still; waves could be heard breaking unhurriedly on the beaches and against the rocks.

Captain Weeks was on the bridge. I went up and joined him. Sleep seemed to have refreshed him, and he turned to me with a smile less worried than it had been for days.

"You look better, Captain," I told him.

"I feel better," he admitted. "There's nothing to be gained by worrying now. We'll have to make the best of whatever turns up."

I asked him the question I had been pondering over before I fell asleep.

"Can we depend on the passengers? And the crew?"

“We can depend on the passengers. They seem to be intelligent people. As for the crew—well, it varies. They’re good seamen. Some of them look like pretty rough customers, if it should come to trouble.”

We examined the coast line again, Captain Weeks lending me his glasses.

“Looks deserted, eh?” he said. I nodded “Tell me, Captain,” I said, “what resources have we for a Robinson Crusoe act?”

“I don’t know. I’ve been wondering myself; but it’s a complicated thing to start a settlement.”

“Have we any tools?”

“A few of the rudimentary sort. There are axes, for instance—fire axes, you know. Of course we’ve hammers—nails—saws. I suppose we’ve all we’ll need.”

“Any books—technical books, I mean?”

“None except a few about navigation and ships’ engines, and so on.”

“Well, we can make out all right, anyhow?”

“Of course.” Captain Weeks smiled, and his grey eyes grew hard. “A man doesn’t have to have anything but his hands, you know.”

We steamed on down the coast. We were approaching a point where the line broke and turned inland. A few miles beyond that it reappeared and went on, curving a little before us until it merged into the horizon.

“That looks like a harbor, doesn’t it?” I said.

“Or a bay. Some sort of shelter. We’ll hope it’s navigable—as it should be.”

I looked down and saw Pretloe. He was watching the coast line too, but after a moment he turned and came up. Already there were a few people on deck—a tall, middle aged lawyer, John Bealy, the two daughters of Mr. Newton, the banker, and a couple of boys I didn’t know. The boys were with Mr. Newton’s daughters.

“How do they seem to take it, Mr. Pretloe?” Captain Weeks asked.

“They don’t know yet. Mr. Baley has just been assuring me that it doesn’t look at all like England.”

“And the young people?”

“Apparently don’t care where they are.”

We paced the bridge in silence, absorbed in thought. The break in the coast line was opening out into what seemed to be a large bay, extending for at least some miles inland. I more than half expected that we should any moment find smoke hovering over it, and see the first signs of a low sky-line such as cities have on the European water fronts. But the bay was deserted. There were no ships at anchor, no docks, no scattered houses nor people bathing.

It was time for breakfast. By now most of the passengers were up and clustered along the rail. We could hear the subdued sound of their voices. They were trying to place the coast, and its unfamiliar harbor. As we went down to breakfast, passing among them, they turned, one by one, and looked hesitantly at us. They wanted to question us, but none had the courage to intrude first. Captain Weeks bowed to them graciously, with a composed smile on his lips, and passed into the saloon. They followed, crowding about the door.

Our table—for by this time I had a regular place at the Captain’s table—was the center of attention throughout breakfast. Captain Weeks announced briefly that he would have a statement to make In the main saloon later. We were all very quiet. Most of the passengers hurried through the meal, but the three of us, among a few others, ate in our usual leisurely fashion. We were conscious of an impending crisis, but we preferred to ignore it as long as we could.

I shan’t attempt to describe all that took place during our meeting in the main saloon. Basically, it was a public review of the theory—now virtually accepted as fact—Pretloe had worked out for us some days earlier. The passengers sat around in groups and listened. At first they were too amazed and incredulous to appreciate fully how completely they had been cut off from all their old ties and associations. Later, as a realization of the magnitude and weirdness of the situation came to them, they were too overcome with a feeling of unreality to speak or even to think. Captain Weeks was very calm, very courteous, and he did his best to convey the impression that he meant to treat the whole thing in a matter-of-fact fashion. He assured them that we would work out plans and keep in mind the possibility of finding a way back into their world.

“But,” he added, “it’s better not to put too much hope in that. None of us is responsible for what has happened. If we all determine to cooperate with each other—as we shall have to do for our own salvation—we shall certainly be able to set up a new civilization which will

endure and grow until, eventually, it can adequately replace the old. We have no alternative; and it is useless, of course, to mourn or question what has happened. It is an act of God." With that pious conclusion, he left. Pretloe and I followed.

Later he addressed the crew in much the same manner. By that time we were already advancing slowly into the harbor, being careful to take soundings for the depth. It was a long, wide bay, narrowing at the end opjtosite the sea into a river which looked navigable.

The three of us, as usual, gathered in Weeks' cabin to discuss plans. It was a fantastic thought, to me, that we were stranded here, like shipwrecks, on a deserted coast, cut off completely from civilization, yet in possession of the one thing no other castaways in the history of the world had ever had—a ship.

"I suppose," Captain Weeks said, "the first thing we shall have to do will be to plant an American flag on the shore." Pretloe shrugged impatiently.

"Why?" he said. "It's about as inaccessible to development as any land I ever saw."

"Still—for form's sake?"

"It would be a futile gesture, since we can't ever hope to open communication again with our government. If we ever should—well, that will be another matter."

"Then what do you advise?" Pretloe smiled.

"It doesn't seem very important to me; but we might give the place a name. One that doesn't smack too strongly of any nation, so that we won't hurt the feelings of any foreigners we may have on board—we need every sort of amity. Then we'd better get on with the business of building a town. We'll make it our own territory for the present."

"Ours personally?"

"The ship's at large. And ours to apportion out so long as we're in command."

I made a suggestion.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to define the sort of government we're having?"

"Oh, a republic, of course!" Captain Weeks said hastily.

"Or, perhaps, a dictatorship at first?" said Pretloe. "You, after all, are the logical leader. We know we can trust you. You can name a cabinet, and we'll work out our plans together. But

we'll need some definite authority for the first few months. . . ."

I don't intend to set down here the details of that long conference. It was a perplexing task to make plans for a community so large as ours. We hardly finished with the preliminary discussions that morning. We agreed finally (with a smile) that it would be simple enough to call our new continent Leaguoa, after the League of Nations, and that plans for a permanent form of government could wait for the present. It seemed advisable for everybody to remain on board, until we had explored the immediate countryside and put up buildings. We could transfer them gradually to the land, and keep the ship as a stronghold against possible aggression by natives. There was very little else the ship would be good for until, perhaps, years later.

In the afternoon, immediately after dinner, we organized a party to go ashore and examine the land about the bay. I think the passengers, most of them, were still too dazed to understand what had happened. A few of them, especially the young people, took the whole thing as an adventure—which, I suppose, in a way it was. Mr. Newton's daughters wanted to go along, but of course Captain Weeks wouldn't hear of it. We took, instead, a Mr. James Folk, who had turned out to be a farmer from the West on his first vacation after twenty years of large scale farming, and the two husky boys I had seen with the Newton girls on the deck that morning. They were college boys of average intelligence, both of them sons of a retired financier who was on board—a Mr. Vance. We had some sailors with us, of course, and we carried revolvers.

We examined the margins of the bay on both sides for traces of habitation while the ship lay at anchor in the river's mouth. There were trees growing nearly to the water's edge, and thickening into a forest further back. The trees were tall and straight, but not very thick. Mr. Folk couldn't precisely identify them. We penetrated a mile or so into the forest, but discovered nothing.

We were on our way back to the ship, coming up the bay, when I made my discovery. The larger trees drew back a little from one point along the shore, as if there had once been a small clearing there, and some young trees had grown in their places, very slender and straight. I thought I saw something, a circular ring and dirtywhite, lying under one of the large trees at the edge of the clearing. I left the others, in order to examine it. Nature doesn't grow many plants or animals that are smooth, ring-shaped and white.

It was a life preserver.

I called to the others, and carried it back to them. It had been hanging by a nail to the shore side of the tree's trunk. The cord supporting it had worn through. We carried it down to the water's edge and washed away the caked dry mud and dust that covered it; and underneath we found the inscription. On one side, of course, was the ship's name in faded letters:

THE PACIFIC, NEW YORK

On the other side, in smaller letters, and still more faded, a message had been written crudely with black paint and a brush:

Jamestown Bay, February 20, 1856. Food low. No relief in sight. Lost 23 days. 54 dead after mutiny. Heading south again.

We looked at each other in silence. 1856—and an American ship. We were not pioneers after all. Captain Weeks scratched his chin thoughtfully, with a puzzled frown.

“The Pacific,” he murmured. “I’ve heard somewhere—” Then a light came into his eyes. “Of course ! I remember!”

“What is it, Captain?” I asked.

“One of the famous missing ships,” he said. “She sailed either from Liverpool or from New York—I’ve forgotten now—in January, 1856, and was never heard of again.”

“A passenger ship?” Pretloe said.

“She carried about fifty passengers—and a cargo valued at two million dollars.”

“That explains the mutiny, then.”

“Of course. There was a crew of nearly fifty men.”

“Was there a storm—anything to explain the disappearance?”

“Nothing at all—no storm worth mentioning. There have been other similar cases too. I’ve read of dozens, all authenticated. The President and the City of Glasgow were lost in the same way around 1850 between New York and Liverpool. A troopship, the Lady Nugent, was lost in the Bay of Bengal about the same time with a regiment of Indian troops aboard.

H. M. S. Wasp, a warship, was lost in 1887 between Singapore and Hong Kong. None of these ships ever left any traces—there wasn't even any wreckage found in their vicinity. There were never any storms of undue proportions, and these were all fine, seaworthy vessels."

"Then," I said, realizing suddenly the significance of these accounts, "it is quite possible that we shall find other colonists nearby?"

"But hardly probable," Pretloe added. "Remember that they must have been bewildered by what had happened, as the Pacific seems to have been—" pointing to the life belt, "—and probably went on cruising in search of a civilized port until their supplies gave out. They may have been damaged by storms. Smaller ships than ours, as these must have been, would have suffered severely in such a storm as we encountered, even if it were purely local. In any case, what course they were pursuing after their arrival in strange waters—with regard to the fourth dimension, I mean—may have depended always on chance. There may be hundreds of lost ships and colonies isolated, unrelated three dimensional strata of the earth; but it's unlikely that we shall ever find another in ours."

"Still," said Captain Weeks, "it might be worth while to search some day, in so much as we've a ship at our command. Besides, we'll want to chart our new continent—Leaguoa." Pretloe nodded.

"Of course."

"And incidentally," I remarked, "it seems that our bay has been named for us—Jamestown Bay. I suppose after the first colonists in America." Pretloe smiled, and said:

"I'm glad they had the good sense not to mistake Plymouth for the first English colony in America."

CHAPTER VI

The Distorted City

It still puzzles me a little to recall how many of our passengers on that voyage were men and women of ability and imagination. It seemed that every soul on board, as soon as he had become adjusted to the change in his life, became at the same moment aware of a hundred suppressed ideals surging confusedly under the surface of his mind. We found ourselves in the midst of potential socialists, reformers, educationalists, Fathers of their Country. It was startling; and then I recalled the enthusiasm with which early English settlers in Virginia

and New England had foreseen their visions becoming reality on a virgin soil. But I suppose our colonists have learned, as their fathers did, that a new land doesn't always make a new civilization. They have found that men, wherever they go, carry their old civilizations with them in their hearts—the old prejudices, the old virtues, the old blindnesses. A civilization is only the sum of many people's convictions.

But I was visionary like the rest. I like to think sometimes that possibly our visions are coming true. I can't take the time here to recount in detail all the activity of my few weeks with the colony at the new city of Jamestown. Such an account would fill a lengthy volume. I want to give some idea, though, of what we were planning and what we might have accomplished.

Our idealists were of many sorts. Pretloe, for instance, was a scientist with a mind that had speculated on nearly every phase of human life. He was frantically determined that we should found and build a new civilization governed by scientific principles alone. No haphazard development, he insisted, would do—no vagaries resulting from the conflict of personalities and emotions. For myself, I am an architect. I wanted a city designed from the beginning to care for the most improbable degrees of future expansion. I wanted streets laid out and buildings foreseen that might not become realities for hundreds of years, if ever.

John Bealy, the lawyer, and Charles Newton, the financier, both found themselves to be, without ever knowing it, socialists of a sort. They had discussed their political and economic ideals since their first intimation of what had happened. They discovered a profound conviction that government ownership of business was necessary, in spite of the small fortunes they had privately accumulated in their own investments. They didn't know that this was socialism; they thought of socialism as a process of wandering about naked in the streets and picking up whatever they saw and liked in store windows.

We had a young diplomat on board, Francis Wilson, who had been on his way to Paris as an attache of the Embassy, with his wife and his young child. Wilson, like his illustrious namesake, had ideals in private which might have astonished his superiors at Washington. He believed in a world-state without tariff barriers or any barriers of language and custom. He frowned on all political systems. He wanted a governmental system under which all executives would be chosen by a method of examinations and intelligence tests, from the state governors up-to the President. With John Bealy, Wilson felt that our whole legal and judicial systems should be developed by the best of competent judges and legal authorities.

As to our practical work—it sounds like child's play compared with these ambitions. Captain Weeks added to the cabinet Bealy, Newton, and Wilson. He got out the crew and set them at cutting trees and building under the direction of his officers and the three students. The buildings were crude, of course, but sufficient for a beginning. A dock was built first, at a

point where it was found the ship could come in fairly close to shore. I was drawing beautiful plans, in my leisure moments, of a future city. There was to be a traffic center around the harbor, with docks and termini for railroads and landing fields for airplanes—if we should ever live to build them. I had visions of an elevated drive around the harbor, and elevated streets for private automobile traffic. We were dreamers, weren't we?

We put up temporary houses. At the time of my departure a barracks for the crew had been built already—Weeks was imposing military life and discipline on them—and houses for all the married passengers and our only single woman passenger, Alicia Corey, whom I have mentioned earlier in this account. We had, of course, very few passengers—a little over two dozen. The stewardesses were given a house together. The ship was slowly stripped of its furnishings to fill the various buildings. They were luxurious fittings, and they looked very strange in the rude houses we had thrown up so quickly. We had, too, a building which served as a dining hall and a sort of lounge, with offices for ourselves, and a kitchen. Our idea, you see, was to dismantle the ship as soon as possible. Captain Weeks and his officers, I believe, had plans of their own for the ship, in order that it should be preserved in the best possible condition for the future.

There was a large and varied cargo on board. Ludicrous as it may appear, there were a number of automobiles and trucks, and two airplanes—the latter unassembled, of course. At the time I left, a hangar and a field were being planned for one of the planes. Besides these, there were innumerable other articles—phonographs, beds, bathroom fittings, machinery, etc.—which we used or intended to use as we needed them. We felt that we were entitled to these things under the circumstances, inasmuch as we saw no hope of returning them to their rightful owners. However, a number of the passengers, who were possessed of considerable fortunes, drew up a paper, which they gave Captain Weeks, assuming personal responsibility as a group for the entire cargo, the cost to be taken from their estates in case we should ever return.

In the meantime, our only immediate necessity which could not be readily supplied was food. Our rations were running low. A few wild fruits and berries were discovered in the surrounding woods, but not enough to satisfy the needs of a large group of people. James Folk, the farmer, was making a rapid survey of our resources for various crops. He foresaw the possibility of planting orchards with the fruit trees we had found in the woods. Besides that, he had found among the cargo a consignment of seeds. There was no great variety of these, though, and not enough of them to justify careless experimentation. In any case, it would obviously require months to sow and reap crops sufficient to meet even our most elementary needs. It was fortunately early in the summer, but we were looking fonvard to an unpleasant winter if other sources of food were not found. It was in one of our expeditions to discover whether there were any animals in the surrounding forests that Jim Grady, Pretloe, and I lost the colony.

The reason I have given even so brief an account of our activity lies in the fact that we were presented with what was so far as I know, a unique problem. We were marooned there in that bay—marooned, too, is an apt word, for the ship was running low of fuel—and we were required to set up as quickly as possible a civilization that would give us as far as it could the comforts of civilization we had left. And our resources were, while limited, amazing for a band of castaways. The significance of our attempt is this, I think: that we were required to manufacture a machine-made civilization. We were the colonists of a new era, of an industrial period. And we went at our problem in a thoroughly businesslike manner, wfith the organization and efficiency that modern business had taught us. The results, of course, are unknown to me now. But it was an experiment nobody had ever had the opportunity to make before.

Grady, Pretloe, and I had gone on several hunting expeditions before the final one which ended the adventure for us. We had found no signs of any life except a few rabbits and other small animals. It had become a matter of necessity to make a thorough search for larger game. So far we had penetrated only a few miles into the forest, being careful not to lose our way.

The final expedition was undertaken with great care. We intended to be gone about a week. We were provided, of course, with food, and we would get fresh water from the river or from any other sources we might find with which to fill our bottles. We carried guns, hatchets, and knives. With the hatchets we should have to mark or blaze our trail whenever we left the river. It was summer, so we carried few clothes and no bedding. Our only extra bodily protection was our raincoats. We had a coil of rope which might prove useful. Our intention was to strike up into the hills, following the river as far as we could.

One morning, after the early breakfast to which we had all become accustomed, we began our journey up the river. Before it disappeared behind a broad bend in the stream, I took one last look at the colony. More than anything else, it resembled the pictures you sometimes see of colonial settlements in Virginia. The row of little houses stretched along the side of the bay, with the big dining hall in the center, where the dock lay, and behind that the barracks. The ship was a fantastic touch. It had seemed a toy ship, leaving New York beside the Majestic. Now It looked gigantic, towering up above the long dock and the buildings. For the first time in days I noticed that it had no shadow; but I found that its absence didn't affect me so peculiarly as I might have expected. Mr. Newton's daughters and two or three other young women were swimming in the bay with Rudoph Cortez, the young jazz orchestra leader, who couldn't be persuaded to work. I turned away, and went on up the river.

The hills were not far away. We followed the first branch of the river that turned off on our side of the bank. It led us toward a pass through the hills. By late afternoon we had reached the beginning of the pass. Then a thunderstorm overtook us—the first real storm since that

momentous evening our fourth night out from New York. We got out our rain coats and took shelter under the trees until the storm went by. I noted particularly that, while there were flashes of light accompanied by thunder, we saw no actual streaks of lightning. The thunder sounded rather distant.

It was dark afterward, and we couldn't go on without difficulty. We sat down on a big rock at the river's edge and watched the water passing under us, dark and sluggish and quiet, for an hour or so while we talked of our plans for the colony. Then, spreading the coats together on the cold ground, we fell asleep. We were too tired to mind the discomfort.

We were up early, ate our meager breakfast, and went on. The river wound about through the hills, narrowing. When it seemed to be turning back upon itself too much, we left it and started climbing. We had to mark our trail now with our hatchets, which slowed us up somewhat. But the forest was thinning all the time now as we went up, so that we didn't find it difficult to penetrate. Some while after lunch, we reached the summit of a low mountain. It dipped down again before us into a small valley. Beyond that it rose again to another line of hilltops, somewhat higher than these. We had seen no traces of animal life.

We went on. Darkness came as we were starting up the second range of hills. That night we slept on dry twigs beside a small fire that smouldered away during the night. We were no longer afraid that animals might molest us. We had little hope left of finding them. The stillness was profound and disturbing. There were few of the faint night sounds which make our evenings in the inhabited world, murmurous with hidden life. The silence there was the heavy silence of a vacuum, of a deaf man's world.

The following day we continued our climb. Early in the afternoon we reached the summit, leaving the forest behind except for a few scattered trees and the underbrush. Stretching out before us was a long plain, flat with tall grass waving gently in the wind. We went on.

Tired now, after our long climb, we plodded along with our eyes roving absently over the grass immediately around us. The grass was waist-high. It was late in the afternoon when I happened to raise my eyes and then pause. Some miles away, dim in the gathering twilight, and blurred like a dream, stood the apparition of a city. I rubbed my eyes, and smiled. Certainly there could be no city in front of us. But Pretloe and Grady had paused too, and were looking fixedly at it.

After a long silence, I managed to say breathlessly:

"What is it, Pretloe—a mirage?" He looked at me a moment doubtfully.

"A mirage?" he said. "Perhaps. . . ." Then, suddenly, he roused himself. "Come, we'd better hurry on before it's too dark."

We shouldered our rifles and went on, striding forward with long strides that felt all at once refreshed. As we walked, we watched the city looming up before us. The closer we came to it, the more doubtfully we watched it. It was peculiar—the distorted caricature of a city. I can see it still as we saw it in those few hurried minutes of walking. It's clear and distinct in my mind as I write. But I find that I can't describe with any words the strangeness of that startling apparition. Have you ever approached a little one-street village from the rear of the buildings along that street, and at twilight? It was something like that. We could see clearly many streets crossing each other, filled with traffic, squares and boulevards and buildings. And, somehow it seemed that we could see into the buildings, a confused mass of rooms and halls and moving people, people at rest, people coming in and going out. There were thousands of people everywhere, confused as if engaged in a gigantic struggle. But it seemed also that we saw the city in some indescribable fashion from behind. It was partly dark, partly hidden from us.

We were very close when a startled exclamation burst from Pretloe's lips—

"My God!" Grady and I paused abruptly.

"What is it, Pretloe? What do you make of this?" Grady asked.

And Pretloe answered, his voice breaking a little: "Don't you see? It's Paris!"

We stood there in silence a moment, staring first at Pretloe, then at the distorted city. Suddenly we began to run breathlessly, shouting, and burst into the city. . . .

As if we had waked up from a dream and opened our eyes, we found ourselves standing on a street corner. The plain. with its tall grass waving in the wind was gone. People moved about us, turning their heads curiously as they wentby. Automobiles swept along the wide boulevard, quietly in the twilight. For a moment everything seemed very still. Then we became aware of the sound of many voices, and of the hooting of many horns. And at that moment, too, the lights were lighted up and down the boulevard, all together. It was night. A gendarme approached us, and laid his hand gently on Grady's arm.

"Messieurs?" he said gently, questioningly. And Pretloe, relapsing unconsciously into French, muttered, "Mon Dieu! En verite, e'est Paris!"

CHAPTER VII

Pretloe's Last Word

That's all. We gave out no statements to the press. We didn't care to see the inside of a sanitarium. We registered at an obscure hotel under assumed names, which we have been using ever since. The thing was simply too incredible to make public. Grady, a quietly observant and methodical fellow, had taken note of all the passengers and their names. Together Grady and I got in touch with their attorneys, and explained in private what had happened. I don't suppose we were believed, but it was a reassurance of a sort. The attorneys presumably did whatever they felt it their duty to do. And Grady explained as well as he could to the owners of his ship. They fired him.

Before I left New York to straighten up my own affairs, I had a last talk with Pretloe at the hotel. He hadn't much to say.

"You can't expect me to explain it," was the sum of his remarks. "Somehow or other we are back, and that's all. My theory? Well, personally I'm getting a little tired of my theories. I'd like a little solid fact for a change. All I can suggest is that when we got out of our stratum we were completely adrift so far as the fourth dimension was concerned. For awhile, probably, we left it behind. Then we must have drifted back. Or perhaps we never were very far away—just far enough away to make the radio and our lights useless. There's no way to tell. Somehow, at the end, we landed with our line (our three dimensional line) converging toward this one, like a straight line converging toward the equator we used to talk about. ... I suppose the others will wander back, one by one." But, none have appeared.

I must make it clear that we never intended to desert them. You must imagine us as we were that afternoon in the twilight when we saw the distorted shape of Paris in front of us. We hadn't time to think. We saw it; something turned over frantically in our minds, and we ran. When we found ourselves standing on the street comer, in the midst of the crowds, it was too late. There was no way back.

Pretloe has lost himself in a maze of experiments. He is studying his physics all over again. He feels that, with even the meager data our experience gave us, we can eventually find some way back into the waste land where our colony is stranded. He talks of complicated instruments and machines in the rare letters I get from him. Personally, I think it's a waste of time. Besides, it's January now, and I don't know what they're doing for food. Probably they won't even survive.

New York, though, has palled on me of late, as it used to pall on me when I first left Virginia and came here. Secretly I've been wishing I were back in that adventure, with its ludicrous details and its heroic outlines. If Pretloe ever does work out his machines, and finds a way to rejoin them, I'll be with him. I can't forget the stillness, and the sea breaking gently on a shadowless beach.

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