River of Time

Science Fiction novels by WALLACE WEST:

RIVER OF TIME

OUTPOSTS IN SPACE

THE MEMORY BANK

LORDS OF ATLANTIS

River of Time

WALLACE WEST

AVALON BOOKS

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For Arta and Wayne

CHAPTER I

The alarm clock exploded.

I pawed for a light switch and blinked in the glare. Three twenty-five. Five minutes early. I had time for . . .

"'Member wha' happen' las' week, Ralph," mumbled the voice of conscience, in the person of my brother. "Be'er ge'tup ri' now or Tarlington'll spank."

"Oh shut up, Sam, and go back to sleep." I turned over.

"Feud taken tha' physics job at Bell Labs like I said you wouldn't need to wake growin' boy in middle of night."

I groaned, swung my beefy shanks from under the blankets and fumbled on the icy floor for slippers.

"Fine bears i' nicebox," mumbled the voice.

"Stop talking Chinese, will you?" I snapped.

"I said," my brother articulated coldly as his tousled head emerged from the covers of a bed on the other side of the room and opened one eye, "that, if you were strong enough this morning to look real hard you might find a bowl of blueberries in the refrigerator. And don't spill cream all over the floor again."

Sam is like that; when awakened before dawn he is ready to lick his weight in wildcats. He wanted me to be a physicist like Dad. Instead, I go gadding into New York every morning to be a TV commentator's ghostwriter. Poor kid.

"All right. All right!" I soothed him. "I'll find the berries."

"Betcha don't," he sniffed as he pulled the covers over his head.

I considered a shower but discarded the idea as fantastic. Shaving had to be done, though, which was problem enough, with the weight I had been putting on. Finally, there was the riddle of the refrigerator. The blueberries Sam had mentioned simply were not there! I unearthed an orange, scrambled four eggs, brewed some coffee, gulped it along with

several slices of bread and jam, and stumbled through melting snow toward the garage.

The car was cold and cranky as a sponsor's heart, which was a good thing this morning. By the time I cozened it into operation and backed out of the drive-way, I was awake enough to cope with Moun-tain Avenue.

Mountain Avenue is one of those roads which prowl the Watchung ridge of New Jersey with a fine disregard for maps, geodetic surveys and even Orson Welles' never-to-be-forgotten Martians. It can be met with in Westfield, Scotch Plains, Plainfield, and, I think, even Summit—though how it gets to all those places baffles me. Our stretch of it is practically perpendicular, as it leads down to Route 22.

After squealing my tires around numerous hairpin turns, I swung left on the highway to New York, lit a cigarette and began my day (lower case). Fully alive now, I faced reality: within exactly one hour and fif-teen minutes, EST, I would be batting out copy for the 7:45 commentary over station WHJ. (Bill Ben-ning would read and mug it over the air, worse luck, and, for his resounding vowels, be paid four times as much as the figures on my salary check.)

My fat head was empty of plans for a script. Of course I could filch ideas from the *Times* and *Trib,* and from teletyped reports by API and UPI. If those sources failed, I could fall back on "re-

liable sources" to explain the events of the preceding day. But what explanation was there, really, for such news items as (a) that our outnumbered GI's somehow had got themselves embroiled with a Chinese army along the Thailand border, (b) that the stock market was in another of its periodic funks and (c) that this May morning of 1964 was giving a good imitation of January because of the distortion of the Van Allen Belt caused by our latest high-altitude atomic test shot?

I groaned. Maybe I should "go personal," as Brinkley does when things get beyond his depth . . . forget the Cold War and deal with H. I. stuff: This road, for instance, dark as the inside of Khrushchev's heart because of the dimout that had been imposed to combat the fuel shortage caused by a ferociously cold winter. Not even a truck in sight at this hour, except for that big fellow, obviously disabled, that was guarded by feebly flickering flares. (Change that! Benning would tie his tongue in knots pronouncing those three "F's." Make it "lazily smoking flares.")

Yes, I would take the easy way out and talk about the rapidly changing American scene. Let's see, now. . . . I might get some fun out of the battle for control of the trading stamp empire. . . . Or . . .

I eased in on the brakes. A hundred yards ahead a man in uniform stood at the snowpiled roadside, thumbing me down.

"Hi-yah, soldier." I swung the door wide. "Going to New York?"

"*Non, m'sieur,*" he answered as he clambered in. "*Je ne* . . . I mean, I would not be welcome in New York jus' now. Let me out at Westfield."

I glanced at him sharply. That blue and buff uniform . . . that tricorn hat! I couldn't place them. Could it be the dress uniform of some officer from the *Richelieu?* I knew she had just docked in New York.

"My name's Ralph Graves," I said to make him feel at home.

"*Charme.* I am *Le Marquis de Androuins.*"

That title rang a bell somewhere, but very faintly.

"Are you from the *Richelieu?*" I enunciated carefully.

"From *Le Cardinal?*" he puzzled. "Oh, *non.* He is dead."

"From the battleship," I insisted.

He spread his hands helplessly in the dim glow of the dashlight.

I tried a new tack. "How do you stand? That is, what is your opinion about the way in which De Gaulle is handling the Algerian situation?"

"*M-sieur,*" he answered slowly, "I may tell you that I take no part in your politics. I feel shame on myself for this, but when one is in the midst of a hot war, one has little time to consider a cold one."

"Well," I snapped, "what does one do in the midst of a cold war? Crawl into a hole?"

"Sometimes"—his voice had a touch of sadness—"one does."

A pacifist, I decided. But, in that case, why the uniform?

"One crawls into a *petit trou,*" he continued, "and one tries to forget that past, present and future are one, and that the fate of your De Gaulle may have been decided at the battle of Lexington—or may even *decide* the battle of Lexington, *parbleu!*"

I have often picked up queer characters, but what kind of talk was this for four in the morning? It sounded like the science fiction that Sam sometimes reads to me to put me to sleep. Yet Le Marquis sat serene and detached, his long aristocratic face sane as a rock despite the cocked hat above it.

"*Attencion, m'sieur,*" he warned. "She makes a mist!"

She certainly did! A morning fog off the Jersey flats had swirled in upon us; all at once I could barely make out the right-hand margin of the highway.

"You must know," he resumed as I slowed down, "that the world she is one of probability, rather than of the cause and effect. All life is as a great door, hinged in the far distant past and extending through today into the far distant future. When that door

swings through time, all of it swings—not just the part we know."

"Yeh," I humored him. "Sam—he's my kid brother—read me a story about that once. Seems a fellow built a time machine, went back to the time of the dinosaurs and killed a butterfly by accident. Really complicated the hell out of things in the present."

"Ah, you make it sound so simple, *mon ami,*" sighed the marquis. "But a time machine is impossible. I have tried to build one."

"You don't say?" I put the car in second as the fog grew thicker.

"You will find that I speak true," came the smug answer. "No time machine will ever penetrate the past of this world, or the future either. There is, as you say, a paradox. Nevertheless . . ." He laid a white hand on my arm. "I assure you that the present can change the past by acting in the present and vice versa. *Comprenez vous?*"

"Non!" I said through my nose, feeling that I was in deep water and going down for the last time.

"Let us take, *alors,* an example. Consider the Conquistadores—Cortez, Balboa, Pizarro and the rest. In your boyhood you were taught that they were heroes who brought civilization and Christianity to millions of bloodthirsty Indians. But now, your country has

develop' its Good Neighbor policy with the descendants of those Indians. And, *voila,* new documents are discover' which show the Conquistadores were bloodthirsty, gold-crazed savages who destroyed great Indian civilizations."

"But . . ."

He waved me to silence.

"Next we shall look at Alexander, Napoleon and other dictators. In times of oppression, these men are held up as heroes, but when democracy gains the upper hand, it is found that they were power-mad scoundrels."

"Yes," I admitted as I squinted through the windshield, "but what does that prove—merely that research has uncovered facts that had been forgotten or hidden by interested parties. You confuse history with the interpretation of history."

"And can you separate the two, *mon vieux?* Being a journalist, you must know that, if you ask four witnesses to describe a fire, a crime or an accident, you will get four different and conflicting stories. Therefore, all past events are only interpretations. And therefore, I insist that present events can alter those of the past. I know, *moi,* that if reaction prevails in your world, historians will prove that Washington really lost the battle of Yorktown and that the Tories —Loyalists, they will be called—were the heroes of the ill-fated colonial rebellion."

"You're crazy," I snapped, forgetting that, on a lonely road, it is best to humor madmen. "I never heard such tripe. When a battle's won, it's won. When it's lost, it's lost forever." Then I brought up something else that bothered me. "A moment ago you said I was a journalist. How do you know?"

"One who has been a friend of *Le Compt de St. Germaine* knows many things," he shrugged. "I know also you are a physicist."

The Count of St. Germaine! That name rang a bell, all right, thanks to the things Sam had read me: Sorcerer-scientist extraordinary of the later years of the French Empire; rival and perhaps peer of Cagliostro! St. Germaine, if I remembered rightly, claimed to be immortal and proved it to the satisfaction of five generations of European notables.

I stole a glance at the marquis. He did not seem disturbed by my outburst.

"I did not expect you to believe, *m'sieur*," he sighed. "I have told the same story many times along this highway in an effort to win aid for the cause I serve. Either my listeners could not understand, or they laughed, or they grew angry like you. Even when I made to tell them of how George Washington cut down the cherry tree, they . . ."

"You mean the chestnut tree," I whooped as I just succeeded in swerving the creeping car out of a ditch. "Everybody knows that cherry tree fable was

invented by Parson Weems to keep his Sunday school pupils from stealing fruit in a neighboring orchard."

"You have of both right and wrong, *M'sieur* Graves. But do not forget that that tale was most popular in days when Jim Fiske, Commodore Vanderbilt, and the other robber barons were bleeding America white. It was something for people to cling to, then—the thought that at least the Father of His Country was honest. Later, when public morals improved, the incident sounded false, and was found to be but a fairy tale."

"That's a clever rationalization," I grinned, "but are you trying to say the cherry chopping actually happened?"

"*Certainment!* General Washington told me about it himself only last week."

Just as this whopper came out, the car slid off the peak of that awful road. Rear wheels landed in ruts full of mud and spun wildly. The motor spluttered and died under the overload.

"Ah, I am indeed sorry, *mon ami,*" purred the marquis as we piled out and surveyed the situation. "Perhaps I can find for you a span of oxen."

"Oxen! If you'll just give her a push, I believe I can get her back on the road."

He looked at me haughtily. "A French nobleman does not push her, as you say."

"All right," I surrendered. "Lead me to that span of oxen or, better yet, an all-night garage."

Le Marquis sloshed off and I followed. We began to climb a stiff grade and I realized what must have happened. Due to fog and equally muggy conversation, I had made a left turn onto some country road leading across the Watchungs toward Springfield or Morristown. Heavens knew where we were. The first thing to do was to reach a phone and get somebody to pinch-hit for me at writing Benning's commentary.

"Do not be alarmed, *M'sieur* Graves, the Frenchman murmured. "I shall have you back on your way in no time—in exactly no time at all. Friends of mine are not far from here. But do not make over-much of noise. Cornwallis' men may be on the lookout."

"Cornwallis?"

"Yes, Lord General Cornwallis has a strong force stationed at Westfield, about three miles away. Usually, however, his men they are too lazy to go prowling the night."

"Now look here, my friend." I gripped his arm in the pitch blackness. "This joke has gone far enough. I may have written some wacky stories in my time, but I don't live them."

"*Non?* With me it is the reverse."

"Just what's your game?"

"Game?" he floundered. "If you mean what work I do . . . with the help of General Luis Letisane du Portail and the encouragement of *Le Marquis de Lafayette,* I am training engineers for the United States Army."

His words rang true, somehow. Besides, what was the use of arguing, with mud sloshing over my shoetops?

"If you know history," he continued softly, "you recall that it was *Le Marquis de Androuins* who formed the U. S. Army Engineers, who put the outline of the Fortress of Verdun on their uniform buttons and who proposed that their slogan be '*Essayons* . . . We shall try.' "

"And what are *you* essaying now, *M'sieur le Marquis?*"

"Simply to keep Cornwallis from capturing Morristown."

"But good Lord, man, if you're on the level you must know the Revolution was won more than a hundred and seventy-five years ago. So why risk your noble neck prowling the mountains at this hour?"

"*Simplement*—because the Revolution has *not* been won. Right at this moment is being lost, *parbleu!* General Washington's remnant of an army is encamped in shacks just west of Morristown. Congress refuses to pay his ragged men. Thievery is rife. The Pennsylvania Line talks of rebellion and of

marching on Philadelphia. Here a few score of us engineers struggle to build a road along the top of the Watchung Mountains that will enable our brave commander to obtain cannon balls from the last good iron mine we hold—the one at Princeton."

"But . . ."

"No buts! The Redcoats are at Westfield. If they take it into their thick heads to break through the mountains, our goose, she is cook'. And, in the twentieth century, your goose, she is cook', also."

"Confound it, I know . . ."

Before us a light flared. It was a torch held by a man clothed only in a dirty blanket. Beside him stood another scarecrow carrying a long rifle.

"Who's a'comin' thar?"

"Androuins and a friend."

"Pass."

The rifle dropped, the torch was hidden and the soldiers crawled into a birchbark tepee.

We entered a clearing where perhaps a hundred men crouched around fires before the entrances of tents and holes dug in the hillside.

"This camp, and others like it, are all that bar the way to Morristown," said my guide. "Does it look like a successful revolution?"

"No," I had to admit as I surveyed those hollow-eyed winter soldiers. Most of them had their feet wrapped in pieces of bloody sacking. Many were

naked to the waist. A few, who hovered nearest the fires, were entirely naked. My flesh crawled.

"We need help," sighed the nobleman, "need it badly if we are to hold out until my countrymen can come. Tom Paine were here yesterday, trying to cheer up the men by reading from 'Common Sense' and 'The Crisis,' but they were too hungry to listen. They loot the countryside. In the night they drift away by twos and threes. Soon there will be no troops left here. The path to the Cannonball Road, to Morristown, and northeast to Westchester will be open. That is why I brought you." There were tears in his pale blue eyes.

"But what can I do, man?" Then, with mounting enthusiasm, I added: "Maybe I could wangle a plane and some machine guns from the government. That would be enough to . . ."

Androuins shook his head. "That will not work. I have tried her. You see, *mon ami,* one must remember that all machines are built in four dimensions; length, breadth, height, and time. When they are brought here their time dimension may be, how you say?, twisted. Only the simplest of them work well. The machine guns, they jam after a few rounds. The motors miss and finally stall, just as did that of your car. Look at your watch."

I did. It had stopped at 4:05.

"I thought of making modern weapons here," con-

was only farmland sweeping up toward the Watchungs. My tires squished into the ruts they had made ten hours before. My motor developed asthma. A few white farmhouses dotted the countryside ahead, but of the broad highway I had just left, not a trace remained.

Finding the second marker was simple, as was the spot where the Continentals had pushed me out of the mud. Leaving the car there, I started uphill on foot.

I had not gone far when the distant barking of an order made me look over my shoulder. Half a mile away, advancing over the snow patches on the stubbly field in close formation, like lead soldiers deployed on a carpet, came several companies of Cornwallis' best! The attack upon Morristown which the marquis had feared was starting.

I sprinted for the forest which lay, dark and forbidding, along the flanks of the hills.

Not a shot was fired after me. Sniping, apparently, was beneath the dignity of the English.

I seemed to run forever, with my breath getting shorter and shorter. Lord, was I out of condition! As I scuttled into the timber at last, a long arm reached out from behind a tree and collared me.

"Not so fast, stranger," snapped a harsh voice. "Who be ye?"

"A friend of the Marquis des Androuins." I squirmed impotently in that grip of steel.

"Oh, ye be that feller whose devil buggy I helped push out of the mud." My captor fingered a knife at his belt. "I dunno . . ."

Only the appearance of the marquis saved me from dying almost two centuries before my time.

"None of that, Tom," snapped the engineer-commander. "Bend your eyes on those Redcoats. But don't fire until you can see the whites of theirs." Turning to me, he added: "I hoped you would have of the vision to find your way back. I know not what you did in the twentieth century but the results, they are of abundance. A food train broke through from Princeton, so we have eaten. A runner, he came from Philadelphia with news that Congress has appropriated money for part of the pay of the army. My men, they are as of new." He waved proudly toward the forest, which, I now saw, was bristling with rifles and muskets.

"The commentary I wrote seems to have pepped up those Britishers, too."

"Pepped up? Oh, this attack. She has been preparing for long. Had she come yesterday we would have been *fini*. Now, perhaps, I do not think so."

I found it hard to share his optimism. Oh yes, I had read about the deadliness of the backwoodsmen's long rifle, and the effectiveness of guerrilla tactics no

longer could be denied. Still, that picturesque column, moving across the valley to the tune of fife and beat of drum, looked plenty formidable to an armchair strategist.

"I know of what you think, *M'sieur* Graves," said the marquis, smiling, "but be of such kindness as to remember our slogan for the army engineers: *'Essay-ons!'* "

By now the enemy were so close that it seemed they meant to march between the tree trunks. How far *could* one see the whites of a man's eyes?

Almost at once I found out. Our first volley sowed death in those parading ranks. Redcoats fell like poppies to lie screaming and kicking in the mud. One more volley and . . .

No second volley came. I saw Tom, the lanky fellow who had grabbed me, laboring to reload his rifle with powder, wadding and ball. He plied his ramrod like lightning, yet . . .

"Fix bagonets! On the double! Charge!" shouted a captain in an embroidered uniform whose beardless face was surmounted by a foot-tall white shakko.

The woods swarmed with Hessians dressed in long-skirted blue coats, yellow waistcoats extending below the hips and yellow breeches met at the knee by black gaiters. I ran like a rabbit. There were a few hasty shots from our side. Then my companions also turned tail.

I found myself crying for the first time in my adult life. For lack of a tommygun or a few hand grenades the battle was being lost! And, quite possibly, the battle for One World was being lost with it in that other time to which I belonged.

Like Lot's wife, I looked back. My foot caught in a root; I sprawled, the breath knocked out of me. As I rolled over, a giant Hessian sprang at me. He was something with which to frighten babies: A thick tallow paste covered his hair, which was drawn tightly back and plaited into a braid that hung nearly to his waist. His moustachios were fiercely stiffened with black paste. Above all towered a cap with a heavy brass front.

Fritz lifted his "bagonet" for the kill, grinning all over his doughy face. A rifle cracked. The creature crumpled.

"Be ye foolish, Devil Buggy?" yelled Tom as he busied himself with the ramrod once more. "Run for camp!"

Rifles were cracking all about me again as I scrambled up; our attackers were falling right and left. Still they came on, incredibly maintaining their line despite the trees. Still they withheld their fire, intent on driving us into some clearing where we could be exterminated.

That clearing—the one containing our miserable camp—soon loomed ahead.

"To the left. Out of the line of fire," whooped my lanky friend.

We managed to stay among the trees but our pursuers did not. Straight on they marched—to come face-to-face with a battery of small cannon. Two engineers, matches in hand, bent over the nearest guns. The third was manned by none other than Caldwell.

"Fire!" screamed the wildeyed minister. "For the glory of God and the damnation of all Hessians."

The guns belched flame and grapeshot. The "thin red line of heroes" now found it their turn to break and run . . . as many as still could run.

"That settles it, I calc'late," Tom grinned.

But he was wrong. Somehow, the enemy had managed to drag several field pieces after them. Soon a well-aimed fire dismounted our pitiful weapons and sent us scampering through the woods once more toward the crest of the range . . . and the precious Cannonball Road.

This time the marquis kept his men in hand. From every tree, from every clump of bushes, unseen rifles kept cracking. True, the Redcoats came on, but now they began to falter.

"That squirrel is my meat, even at two hundred yards," said Tom as he cuddled his rifle to his cheek, took careful aim and fired at the young British captain who was belaboring his men with the flat of his sword to make them advance.

The officer and his tall hat went rolling in the mud.

Androuins, Caldwell, and a few other Continental leaders were everywhere now. The minister thundered out hymn tunes when he wasn't wielding a borrowed rifle; the Frenchman alternately cursed his men in that wonderful English and kissed outstanding fighters on both cheeks.

"Do not let *les Anglais* reach the road," he pleaded over and over. "They must not even learn of it, else Cornwallis will send his whole army to take it. Hold them, *mes amis, pour le gloire, pour la patrie.*"

"Hey, Bill," yelled Tom, after the battle had lasted for an hour or more. "Ye got any waddin' left?"

"Only a mite," answered a bush at my left.

"Toss me a piece. I've run out."

A small wad of cotton flew through the air and landed at our feet. Tom rammed it down on top of his charge and fired once more.

Now other disembodied voices took up the refrain: "Waddin'. Waddin'. Who's got waddin'?"

The answers were few. Firing dwindled and soon we were running again. More yards up the hill and we broke into another clearing; this contained a deserted settlement of perhaps half a dozen log cabins. In the center rose a small white church. There Miss Caldwell knelt, white-faced, on the steps, praying for our victory.

The marquis and the minister did their best to rally the Americans, but to little avail.

"No meat, no pay and no blasted waddin'," shouted Bill, revealed now as a hulking fellow wearing nothing but a pair of pants. "We got thirteen kings down in Philadelphia 'stead of one in London. I'm fed up. To hell with this war." He threw down his rifle and started to walk away.

"Do not blaspheme, Bill!" the minister thundered, his gaunt face white. "What is it ye lack?"

"Waddin' for the guns, idiot," shrieked Bill. "Without it we're like sheep in a slaughter pen."

"Would paper do?" Caldwell asked as he rubbed his long chin.

"Of course, man. But where is paper in this wilderness?"

Caldwell leaped up the church steps and disappeared inside. Moments later he staggered out, his arms full of books.

"Here ye be, boys," he shouted, hurling the volumes in all directions. "If ye don't have wads, boys, give 'em Watts! Give 'em Watts!"

As the Continentals began ripping leaves from the books and ramming them into the muzzles of their flintlocks, I picked up one that had fallen near me. It was entitled "Watts' Hymnbook!"

That called for a song so I lifted my voice in "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." It was

to that tune and "Yankee Doodle" that we reformed and chased the enemy all the way to the outskirts of Westfield. For the time, at least, the Cannonball Road and Washington's headquarters were safe!

After the celebration ended that night—meat might be non-existent, but there was plenty of rum and hard cider in our ruined camp—Androuins escorted me to my devil buggy.

"You did well, *M'sieur* Graves," he said as he gripped both my hands. "As well as anybody could do under the circumstances. And yet, that 'well' she is not enough.

"This Revolutionary War, she should not be being fought, *parbleu!* Had not something gone wrong, somewhere or sometime, England and the colonies could have composed their differences without bloodshed. And in your world, men of good will should not be clawing at the eyes of one another like savages. There is a key to all this senseless frenzy, could it be found—perhaps in the far past or the distant future."

"I want to help," I answered softly as I climbed behind the wheel. "Where might I find that key?"

"I do not know, *bonhomme*." He wrung those fine long hands. "And yet . . . and yet Le Compt de Saint Germaine once told me there is a man out in your West . . ." he waved vaguely in that direction,

"who knows more of the workings of time than others. Perhaps you could find him."

"I'll find him," I promised.

Whereupon the worst happened. The marquis kissed me on both cheeks!

Looking back, just before the time flicker blacked out that little bloody band of winter soldiers, I saw the Frenchman stoop and pick up the branches I had used to find my way into the past. Although I understood from that that my work in that time was done, it made my throat hurt to realize that now I could never return.

Sam was waiting for me as usual when I pulled into the garage promptly at 1:15 p.m. "What happened to your windshield?" he asked.

"A stone, I guess. A passing car must have flipped it at me off the road."

"Two stones, you mean." He lifted one eyebrow as Sam always does when he catches me in a lie. "There's a hole through the rear window too."

"Sam," I said, deciding to make a clean breast of the whole crazy business, "you ever heard of a Cannonball Road around here?"

"Oh, sure." (My kid brother seems to know most everything except how to get good grades in school.) "Runs along the top of that ridge over there. Wash-

ington built it. I've been there lots of times. Why?"

"Well, let's pack a picnic lunch and walk up there right now. I want to look it over. Besides, I've got a story to tell you."

After the story was told, Sam wiped egg off his freckled chin, leaned back against a tree and chewed thoughtfully on a blade of grass.

"That guy out west," he said at last. "I'll bet that's Prof. Elisha Gordon of Hutter College in Illinois. I was just reading about him in the last issue of *Analog*. Seems he's received a hush-hush appropriation from the government to try to build a time machine. If he succeeds we'll really have the Russkies by the short hair, won't we, Ralph?"

"But Androuins told me a time machine is impossible because of the paradoxes involved," I objected.

"Mebbe so," Sam agreed sagely, "but its worth trying, anyhow, I'd say. Why don't we go out and offer our services to Gordon?"

"We!"

"You, then," he amended. "You've got an M. A. in physics and you've talked for years about getting a Ph. D. Why don't you chuck that stupid ghostwriting job and finish your education under Gordon? I'll help."

"Thanks, pal." I tousled his sandy hair. "But my knowledge of physics is out of date by now and the ghostwriting pays well."

"You're gettin' lazy as a hound dog and fat as a pig," he raged, jumping to his feet. "Gee whiz, Ralph, I want to be proud of my big brother and here's a chance, maybe, for you to make good. But you always choose the easiest way. So you paid your college expenses by working part time at the campus TV station. And so you were good enough that WHJ offered you a cushy job in New York. And so you . . . you bought a farm and spend all your free time muckin' around on it and goin' to seed. It's . . . it's goddam' dull! That's what it is!"

He started to howl.

"All right, Sam. All right!" I grabbed his skinny arm before he could storm off. "You win. I've saved some money. Tomorrow I'll put the farm on the market and tell Tarlington where he can go. (I never did like the stinker.) Then we'll head west in the jeep. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough, Ralph." There were stars as well as tears in his blue eyes.

CHAPTER III

Hutter College has only two claims to fame: it once owned a fabulous football team and it has two geniuses on its faculty.

Back in the '20's, this sleepy denominational school saw which way the so-called educational winds were blowing and dug to the bottom of its small treasury for enough money to buy an entire team and the best coach in the United States. In the next four highly-profitable years this combination financed a new campus, new stadium, and hideous new "Gothic" laboratories, dorms, and other buildings by the simple expedient of licking Red Grange of

Illinois, the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame, and Jim Thorpe of Carlisle.

Tossed out of the Midwestern Collegiate Association for paying its fullback more than its coach, and its coach more than its prexie, Hutter fell upon hard times. Its team, now composed of bona fide students, sometimes managed to hold Muncie Normal to 20 points if the wind was right. Its noble halls echoed to the tread of few and undistinguished scholars. Its gruesome sandstone gargoyles hid themselves for shame under masses of ivy. Its old grads were bedeviled semi-annually for funds to keep the institution limping along.

Things perked up with the advent of the Cold War. Then it was discovered that Hutter had those genuses—President William Henry Harrison III, who had the knack of wangling government appropriations for screwball projects, and Professor Elisha Gordon, Dean of the Graduate School and head of the physics and philosophy departments—that's right, I said physics *and* philosophy departments—who could turn those projects into realities.

Of Harrison III little need be said. He looks like a well-scrubbed pig bent on snatching a blue ribbon at the State Fair. He makes speeches that evoke horrid pictures of Red warships sailing the Great Lakes. He is a phony of the first water but, boy, does he know how to field the appropriations after

M.I.T., Harvard and other first-line universities admit they don't have the facilities or the knowledge to handle a project.

Cyrogenics? Harrison beams like a polished Buddha and opines that Hutter scientists know more about that tricky subject than Jack Frost himself. The desalting of sea water? Hutter's membrane technique cannot be surpassed. A fusion reactor? That may take a little while. A time machine? Should be a pushover for Prof. Gordon, who is America's leading expert in the field.

Though grasping at straws in its efforts to maintain the Free World's lead over the Communist countries, it must be said that the government viewed Harrison's oily claims with a certain suspicion at first. But when he drove his faculty members like a fiend, and marvels began to roll out of Hutter labs on an assembly line basis, a golden tide of federal money began rolling in.

When our jeep drove through the Hutter campus one bright September morn, haggard profs were hustling from lab to lab like worker bees and students actually were sprinting from class to class. The fancy observatory stood dwarfed beside the mockup of a rocket engine. Even the starlings on the ivied walls seemed hushed by all that commotion.

"Wow!" Sam bounced up and down on the hard seat in his excitement. "What a rolling mill. Maybe

I gave you a wrong steer, Ralph. I don't know whether you can take this place or not."

"Too late to back out now," I answered, thinking that, despite old Tarlington, WHJ was a haven of refuge compared to this madhouse. "Let's get settled. Then I'll tangle with Prof. Gordon."

After finding an apartment and enrolling Sam as a senior in the Evansburg High School I jeeped back to the campus and sought out the dean. I had expected to reap the whirlwind; instead I found a quiet, middle-aged, grayhaired gentleman ensconced in an office furnished with leather chairs and huge ash trays.

"Sit down, sir," Gordon said after I had introduced myself. "Have a beer." He ambled over to a spigot in the wall and came back with brimming steins. "Interested in time research, eh?" He sat down at an ancient rolltop desk. "You've come to the right place. Tell me what you've found out, if anything."

After I had related my adventure in the Watchungs, Gordon took off his pince nez and regarded me with such wide brown eyes that the whites showed all around their pupils.

"Androuins is right," he said as he lit a huge pipe. "Time machines are a waste of time. Whenever the world strikes a real crisis, a hole is opened up in the time continuum big enough for a horse to walk

through—and many a horse has done so, I'll warrant, over the millennia. Nevertheless, Hutter has been awarded a million dollars to build such a machine. It means another feather in Piggy's cap, a raise for me and maybe a doctorate for you, so we'll build one and have some fun doing it. My lab assistant is having a nervous breakdown from overwork. How would you like to take his place?"

"Columbus took a chance," I ventured a dim quip.

"Fine! What do you know about the theory of parity?"

"Well . . ." I floundered.

"Exactly! Your physics is rusty as the hinge on a Model T. Ford. Take this refresher." He pointed to an item in the Hutter catalog. "Also, I want you to take a course in conversational Latin."

"Latin?"

"Latin! And here's one I'm giving, based on Sheldon and Stevens' 'Varieties of Human Temperament.' The majority of the students in it are ballast. . . . I'm going to flunk every one of them. But three of my brightest postgraduates are taking it—Mary Peale, Larry Adams and Hugh Woltman. Get acquainted with them. Make friends of them if you can. You're going to be a team. As for other courses, take your pick or toss a coin." He thrust the catalog at me.

"What about a theme for my thesis, Professor? I think . . ."

"Oh, that." He waved airily. "Anything will do. How about another of those things about the drosophila melanogaster? I'll give you some material when you need it. Those pesky fruit flies seem to fascinate the board of examiners."

"Yes sir." I was completely overwhelmed. "But, before I sign up, could I ask you just one question about Hutter? How does it keep making scientific breakthroughs that the big universities have overlooked."

"Can you keep a secret?" He sucked in his thin cheeks and regarded me owlishly.

"Yes sir."

Gordon winked, tiptoed to a side door and threw it open with a flourish. In the next room a huge electronic computer clucked and winked back at him.

"My data retrieval gadget," the professor said as he drained his stein to the machine. "Does all of my work while I enjoy my beer."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Just this: The government spends some two billion dollars yearly on research. Foundations, universities, and other private groups also spend whopping sums. With all that work in progress, it's pretty certain that every bit of necessary data on any conceivable project already has been developed somewhere. Unfortunately, most of that data becomes lost in a forest of filing cabinets. In other words, nobody in

the United States really knows who is doing what to what, researchwise.

"So I developed a system for getting my fingers on that mountain of data—never mind how I did that—and running it through my computer. Invariably the datum I want turns up and, as Androuins would say, *'voila,* the problem, she is solv'. Nice chap, *Le Marquis.* I must meet him sometime."

"Does that apply to the time machine project, sir?"

"Just call me Lysh from now on, Ralph. We've become fellow conspirators against the Powers That Be. . . . No, I can't say it does, although Bartlett, Russell and Wiener have worked out most of the basic temporal equations."

"What purpose will such a machine serve?"

"Eh? Probably none, because of the paradoxes involved." Suddenly he was all business. "Sign these matriculation papers, Ralph, and report to the physics lab at 9 a.m. in a clean smock. A clean one, mind you. Piggy insists."

I rode home on air and reported to Sam.

"Gordon sounds like the Mad Professor," he said dubiously, "but don't worry. I've signed up for every physics course at the high school. Pretty soon I'll be able to help you over the tight spots."

Fall and another fiendishly cold Winter and Spring passed in a fever of activity that took twenty pounds

off me. I fused quartz rods, calibrated verniers, and helped design endless bread-board circuits for that confounded machine Gordon was building inside a requisitioned railroad refrigerator car. Between times, I studied as I had never done in my life. Latin, for the love of God! And that Psychology IV class Gordon was hipped on. And Physics. *And* Math.

Meanwhile, our troops in Asia marched halfway up the hill to Tibet and halfway down again when they could neither live off scorched earth nor receive sufficient supplies by air. China tested a cobalt bomb. At another abortive Summit conference, Khrushchev pounded both his shoes. Food was rationed because hard radiation leaking through the damaged Van Allen Belts had ruined harvests across the world.

And Piggy snagged a two million dollar appropriation for development of an electrothermohydraulic power plant, whatever that may be.

The only time I had to relax was at the informal evening meetings that Gordon held at his home once a week for his pet students. There, while the professor's calm German hausfrau wife—he had met her at Heidelberg in his youth—served us with beer, wonderful coffee and homemade pretzels, we discussed our work, our ambitions, and the woes of the world.

I fell in love with Mary Peale at first sight. Not only was she beautiful . . . trim figure, soft dark

hair, whimsical smile, and fine eyes that looked straight into yours . . . but she didn't jitter like most of Hutter's other students. Gordon paid her the faint praise of saying she was perfectly normal and that he was using her as the control for our "team."

"Mary's only fault is that she is highly susceptible to suggestion," he told us one night as he sat in a comfortable old arm chair, held our attention with those strange round eyes and played with a button on his old-fashioned vest. "I hope she grows out of it. Tell Mary that black is white often enough and she'll believe you." His fingers twiddled the button hypnotically. "Tell Mary to go to sleep and she'll *go* to sleep. Sleep, Mary. Sleep, Mary. Sleep! . . . There! Didn't I tell you!"

The girl, who was sitting at his feet with the rest of us on the old rag carpet, did not move, even when he snapped his fingers under her nose.

"That's a clever stunt, Lysh," cried Hugh Woltman. "How did you do it?" (I never could bring myself to be friends with that big lug although I respected him for his knowledge of astronautics. Perhaps that was because, as a Korean War veteran, he treated the rest of us like children. Or it may have been because Mary worshipped the ground he walked on.)

"I used the same technique you do," Gordon answered after a huge draw on his pipe. "Tell people

"This one!" I looked at the battered old car with misgivings.

"Certainly. We know it works and its very well insulated. We could make a short hop. . . . Yes, I will have another of those, thank you."

"We should wear pressure suits," I temporized, my courage oozing away rapidly.

"Get two of those over at Hugh's project."

I hurried off and came back with the clumsy things to find Gordon humming tipsily as he chopped ice away from the time machine door.

"Never could understand ol' Omar sayin' 'Turn down an empty glass'," he said owlishly. "Fill mine, will you, Ralph, while I get this confounded thing open."

"If you're not used to them, maybe you've had enough."

"Who's the boss around here, Mr. Graves?"

"You are, Herr Professor." I did his bidding. "Here's to Operation Time Warp." Finishing my drink at a gulp I climbed into the car, and started testing the direct controls.

"Just a quick hop," he warned as he followed, lugging the big lab camera. "Far enough to get the solar system out of our hair and take some pictures for edification of Great White Father."

"The quicker the better," I agreed as we helped

each other on with the suits and checked the oxygen pressure and intercoms.

"Make it half an hour." White-faced, despite his studied nonchalance, Gordon put a plate in the camera and stationed himself at a window we had cut into the side of the car.

I adjusted a vernier and snapped a toggle. Nothing happened, apparently. There was no wrench or time lapse. Then the professor beckoned wildly for me to join him. We stared down, from a vast distance, at the sun and its planets.

"We must be somewhere out beyond the orbit of Neptune," I shouted into my mike to make myself heard above the whistle of air leaving the car through a thousand cracks.

"Nothing to it!" Gordon lifted his martini beaker for another toast . . . and shattered it against the face plate of his helmet. "Damn!" he said, then started exposing plate after photographic plate. "There! That should do it."

I reversed the circuits. Instantly, it seemed, we were back in the lab.

"Well!" We looked at each other with let-down, unsatisfied feelings.

"How about one more?" Gordon wheedled. "We've plenty of time before dinner."

"Sure." I busied myself with the shaker, which I

had thoughtfully brought along and placed beside the console.

"I mean one more li'l trip," he said as he opened his helmet and drank thirstily.

"Well . . . O.K., if tha's all there is to time traveling. It's like taking the subway."

"Let's try two years this time. . . . Knock Washington's eyes out with our pix."

"Past or future?" I was feeling the gin and no pain by now.

"Heads for the future." Gordon took out a coin and tossed it.

It came up tails. I made the necessary adjustments, pressed a switch and sat back comfortably.

Instants later I was in furious motion. Temperature inside the car soared; the window glared like a furnace mouth.

"What happened?" Gordon gasped when we were safely back in the lab.

"We came within an ace of falling into some star, I think."

"You must be drunk. How far did you send us?"

"Two years. Honest, Lysh."

"Doesn't make sense. I've read Dr. Shane's report, too. We couldn't possibly have traveled more than one fourth of a light year in that time, and there's no fixed star that close. You hit the wrong button."

"I did not!" Mad clean through at this unjust criticism, I opened the painfully hot port and climbed out to look for damage. None was apparent.

"Then you miscalibrated the instruments." Gordon followed me to the floor, found the gin bottle, upended it, let the reassuring liquid gurgle down, and shuddered.

I followed his example and turned stubborn with Dutch courage.

"I did not! Stake my life on their accurashy."

"You would, huh?" The professor climbed back into the car. "Aw right, then. Stake it! Le's make 'nother little trip right now."

"I should check everything over first." Common sense fought a losing battle with alcohol.

"So you admit you miscalibrated?"

"I do not!"

"Come on in here then."

"Nuh uh." I still hesitated despite my rising anger.

"Wazza matter? You chicken, you fat Viscerotonic."

"O.K. O.K.!" I scrambled back to my place. "We'll shoot th' works. Thousand years into th' future. Now who's chicken?"

"Not Professor Elisha Gordon, Ph. D., F.R.G.S., etc." He made a large, meaningless gesture with the half-empty bottle and just managed to get his face

plate shut before I set the dials and slammed the power switch home.

"Now you've done it," Gordon groaned through the helmet intercom. He was staring out of a window through which glowed not a single speck of light. "Where'd you put us this time, Ralph? Inside a cow?"

I looked from the window to my instruments, suddenly cold sober.

"This is *really* crazy," I muttered. "Since we reversed our direction we should have gone around the rim of the galaxy to a point about 132 light years from Earth. *But there's no galaxy* in sight! Not even a single dinky little star."

"Let me see your coordinates." Gordon snatched a table of figures from the console and squinted at it fiercely. "Absolutely nothing wrong with them," he finally had to concede. "Sun's random motion, galactic rotation, universe expansion . . . all taken into account. Well, let's head for home. It's getting damned cold in here. We'll have plenty of time to double-check tomorrow."

"You and your infallible data retrieval system!" I jabbed viciously at a switch marked *The Present*.

I jabbed again. The velvety, crushing blackness wouldn't go away.

"Lights in the lab must have burned out." Gordon started to open the car door.

"Don't do that!" I shrieked as revelation hit me. "There's nothing *out there!*

"Meemies already?" the professor jeered. But he stood away from the door handle.

"There's a factor we overlooked," I babbled. "Time must be curved, too—just like space."

"So time is curved. Why rave about it?"

" 'A thin rubber blanket,' " I was shaking so hard that I could hardly get the words out. " 'Stretched tight. Stars and galaxies resting on it like marbles—sinking into it a little—curving it with their weight.' That's the way Einstein pictured a space-time continuum. So, if you pass near a star, light—and your ship—start sliding toward it down the curve. That's what must have happened when we almost cooked a while ago."

"We got back that time, though," Gordon pleaded.

"Sure we did. When we headed into the past, we didn't merely go a short distance around the circumference of a circle, the way I thought we would. Some force swung us right into, or even through, the hub of the galaxy where stars are as thick as—bedbugs. Of course there's tremendous mass and curvature *there* for the machine to push against on its way home."

"What's the matter now, though?" Inside his helmet, Gordon's face was white as the night was black.

"My theory is that, by going a longer distance in

the opposite direction, we've hurled ourselves off the rim of the galaxy *and* the universe, like a pebble shot from a sling. There's no matter out here, Lysh—no curvature—nothing to push on."

"How about pushing on this triphammer inside my head?"

"Don't joke. I'm sober." I held out shaking hands to prove it. "Look. Everything is in relative motion. Earth around sun. Sun around the galactic center. All the galaxies, probably, around some unknown hub of the universe—each motion faster than the one before it. So why shouldn't the universe itself move?"

"Move in reference to what?" the professor blinked.

"Lord only knows. We don't have Shane's nebular lighthouses out here. Maybe all the stars whizz along like electrons in a vacuum tube." I pounded my palms against the helmet. "At the speed of light? No! Light speed may not be a limiting factor any more when there is no light. Perhaps at hundreds or thousands of times the speed of light! Don't you see, sir? Don't you see? In the millenium our car has remained in stasis, the whole universe has shot past us, *backward,* and vanished. Now we must wait here until it catches up."

Gordon leaned against the console and closed those staring eyes. I tinkered with the instruments, pushing buttons and switches at random. I stared at

the window, which had frosted white. Good, I thought idly—the rime hid that awful dark. I listened to the thin wail of air escaping from the car.

"Why couldn't there be one star in sight?" Gordon whispered at last. "Just one friendly, beckoning spark." He sighed and stepped up the heaters to their limit. Reflexively he filled the mixer almost to its top with gin, added a whisper of vermouth and bits of ice scraped from the window. He swirled like an expert.

"Time for a drink, Ralph." His eyes were twinkling again. "Time for two, maybe. Time, even, to write our—our experiences and add a note telling us to go on the water wagon so we'll avoid repeating this dumb stunt. Plenty of time."

"If you're not used to them, maybe you've had enough," I said.

"Who's the boss around here, Mr. Graves?

"You are, Herr Professor." I did his bidding. "Here's to Operation Time Warp." Finishing my drink at a gulp I climbed into the car and started testing its controls.

"Jus' a quick hop," he warned as he followed, lugging the big lab camera. "Far enough to get the solar system out of our hair and . . ."

"Hold on, Lysh!" I said sharply. "Who's been in

here? Where did this sheaf of notepaper come from?"

"It's my handwriting," he puzzled. "But I don't remember having . . ." He snatched up the notes and began reading rapidly, passing each page along to me as he finished. Here, in Gordon's crabbed script, was the whole impossible story of forgotten trips we had made—or were about to make—beyond Neptune's orbit, into the corona of some alien star, and out of this universe.

When he finished, the professor picked up the gin bottle, stared at its innocently sparkling contents in utter amazement . . . and emptied them on the floor.

"The best argument for sticking to beer that I've ever encountered." He shivered. "We've been a couple of lucky damned fools, Ralph. Why we're alive I don't know and never want to find out. This proves that, because of the paradoxes involved, a time machine won't work, at least in the present state of the art." He chuckled grimly. "Your friend Androuins was right."

"Then the Earth is kaput and . . . and there goes a year's work on my Ph. D." I thought inanely of the Marquis' final plea and of Sam's disappointment over another of my fiascos.

"Not at all!" Gordon gave me a crooked smile. "I

think I know of a better way to unravel the time torus than trying to ram a box car through it. As for your second complaint: Piggy will have Washington turning handsprings after I develop these photographs." He patted the camera which still reposed on the console. "I'll brief him that the machine has bugs which only a whopping supplementary appropriation can iron out. You'll get your precious doctorate next year if there is one."

"Right now I never want to see the cursed thing again and I'm starving."

"I feel the same way. It's the shock of finding ourselves alive, I suppose. You double lock the car, Ralph, while I phone Security and tell 'em to throw a guard around the lab. Then we'll round up Mary, Hugh and Larry. They're working late on their projects, too, I suspect. We'll have a blowout—no martinis, though, mind you—forget all this nonsense and finish our plans for the European trip."

CHAPTER V

I shall never understand how Piggy Harrison managed to get passports for all six of us—the Gordons, Mary, Hugh, Larry and myself. Few people were traveling, that hectic summer of 1965.

Most countries were partially mobilized. The U.N. was involved in another bitter quarrel between East and West, this one over Castro's Argentine coup. Famine was sweeping Asia and Africa. France was on the verge of revolution; Berliners were cannonading across The Wall, and the United States had slapped an embargo on gold shipments and

closed the stock exchange. Bankrupt England had cancelled plans for her manned Moon shot.

Nobody had the slightest idea of how to reverse the drift toward a World War III that only the most arrant jingoists wanted. There was a lot of pious talk but nothing came of it.

I suspect the expectations raised by those time machine photos had something to do with the State Department's lenient attitude. Anyway, we finally were cleared and gathered with our baggage at the Evansburg Airport.

"I'm sorry you can't go," I told Sam, who came to see me off. (How the kid had grown during the year! Six feet tall now and looking more like his father every day.) "Professor Gordon tried until the last minute to get a passport for you but They said . . ."

"I know. No time for children to be junketing." His eyes blinked rapidly. "Figured it was no good, so I've taken a summer job with Northern Electric Labs."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You have enough worries." He glanced at Mary, who, as usual, was deep in adoring conversation with Hugh. "Time you get back I'll be an old pro with a good leg up on my freshman physics courses here."

"Wouldn't you rather go to a real school like M.I.T? I could swing it."

"Nuh uh. You need *somebody* to mother you, you big lug."

He gripped my shoulder with surprising strength, then strode away through the crowd without looking back.

I'm not going into much detail about the start of our trip. We toured the New York and London night spots and the Lake Country. (Such things are musts for tourists.) Hugh said he got some ideas for his rocket motor by visiting the abandoned British Moon ship at Folkstone. We were barred out of Germany for no particular reason, but given the run of France's laboratories. (The way Frenchmen put workable bombs and things together with string, glue and spit was a revelation to all of us.) Then we forgot physics and took a lazy auto trip down through Provence—where the awful things Frenchmen did to Frenchmen during the old Crusade against the Albigenses are still visible—and along those naked, naked Riviera beaches to Rome.

The rest of them had a pleasant time, I suppose. Lysh was put out that he couldn't attend his class reunion at Heidelberg but Gretchen Gordon never complained about being unable to visit her folks. Larry, who is a serious-minded soul, grumbled that, instead of loafing in the sun, he should have been working

on his power plant. Certainly Mary was in the seventh heaven because Hugh danced attendance on her.

What she saw in that coldblooded—but I won't go into that again. I shall only say that I was perfectly miserable as I rode through the lovely French and Italian countryside cudgeling my brains for some way—any way—of telling Mary that I loved her. Should I go up and say: "Mary, you've just got to listen to me. I'm the man for you. Underneath his polish Hugh is selfish and cruel. He'll make your life miserable."

What could she do then but slap my silly face?

Should I pick a quarrel with the mug? That would be easy, because Hugh had as little use for me as I had for him.

End product: I would get smeared all over the Appian Way!

"Don't be ridiculous," I told myself, and kept right on being. There just wasn't a way out, barring some miracle.

After what seemed about a year, although it really was less than two months, we arrived in Rome, put up at a second-class hotel . . . Piggy didn't pamper his slaves any more than was absolutely necessary . . . and spent a blistering day seeing the sights.

This was a trying experience, since we found the city in an uproar. A rumor had started that either the Russians had delivered an ultimatum to the United

States and its allies or vice versa. There was no real news, but excitable Italians gathered in mobs at street corners, argued at the tops of their voices, and sometimes came to blows. We tried to find what the hullabaloo meant but our course in Conversational Latin proved to be of no help whatsoever.

Returning to the Gordons' dingy room, we found an urgent message from the American embassy. It said all American citizens were to be evacuated and ordered us, in no uncertain terms, to leave Rome on the morning plane. Our tickets were attached.

"This calls for a council of war," said the professor. Characteristically, he went to the house phone and ordered up a supply of beer and pretzels.

When the refreshments arrived and we had made ourselves as comfortable as possible, Gordon pulled at his earlobe and gazed at us, owl-eyed, through the thick lenses of his pince nez.

"Well, my little chickadees," he said at last, "it seems that civilization is nearing the end of its rope."

"Looks that way," Mary agreed as she struggled manfully to down her beer.

"I could go over to one of the radio stations and find out what gives," said I. "Since I'm a sort of frat brother, they ought to give me the inside dope."

"I already have the dope," Hugh yawned. "There were two ultimatums, sent almost simultaneously.

They expire tomorrow, putting everyone up atom creek without a paddle. We can't back down for fear the Russians will still jump us. And they can't back down because they're convinced we intend to jump them."

"I agree with Lysh that an atomic war probably means the end of civilization," said Larry, his blond cowlick tumbling over one eye as he reached for another handful of pretzels. (In case I haven't mentioned it, Larry is six feet tall, approximately six inches wide and looks like a pretzel himself.) "But," he went on as he munched, "there must be some compromise still possible. People don't like this. We all saw how they reacted today. Maybe it's not too late for them to set up some kind of world government."

"In twenty-four hours, Larry?" Gordon lifted an eyebrow.

"We have a world government of sorts," I put in as I poured most of Mary's beer into my empty glass. (I always did that since I knew she hated the stuff.) "Why can't everyone just relax and turn the quarrel over to the United Nations?"

"Most folks don't have your talent for relaxing," Hugh snapped. "Also, we've run out of time, what with every nation on Earth manufacturing atomic bombs or cooking up bacteriological stews. We should have clobbered the Russkies when we still had

our atomic monopoly." He jumped up from where he had been sitting at Mary's feet and paced the room savagely. "When I was in Korea I shot down 20 MIGs and . . ."

"It was 18 the last time you told the story," I said gently.

"Why, you fat . . ." He loomed over me, all square jaw and bone-and-muscle. Well, I had begged for it!

"Easy!" Gordon's voice cracked like a whip. He finished his drink, wiped the foam out of his white mustache, and added: "In other words, Hutter's best brains haven't the slightest idea of how to keep the human race from committing suicide."

"And couldn't do a thing about it, even if they did have an idea," said Mary as she also rose and laid a quietening hand on Hugh's arm. "We're licked. Let's go pack."

"Sit down, Miss Peale, your syllogism's showing," roared the professor. "You too, *Mr.* Woltman."

"Now, Elisha!" Gretchen left off her eternal knitting to interpose. "Remember your blood pressure."

"This is no time to start fighting," Gordon said in a calmer voice. "Remember that those ultimatums don't expire until tomorrow. Meantime . . ." His hypnotic eyes opened to their widest. . . . Meantime, I have an idea about how to stop the war and you four are going to do something about it."

He glared at us, the way he always does in class when somebody makes a particularly stupid remark. I got a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. Mary and Hugh resumed their seats and Larry stopped eating.

"I had hoped," the professor boomed in his best lecture style as he paced the frayed carpet, "that my star pupils had absorbed at least part of what I talked about last semester. Pity I didn't flunk you with the rest of the class.

"Tell me, Miss Peale . . ." His bony forefinger shot out at her. . . . "What is the basic theory set forth in Sheldon and Stevens' 'Varieties of Human Temperament'? Or were you too busy dating Mr. Woltman to read the text?"

"Why—why, of course I read it." She blushed to the roots of her black hair and looked prettier than ever. "The theory, which is based on thousands of case studies, is that a man's physique plays an important role in determining his temperament and thought processes."

"Go on. Go on!" He shoved his fists into the pockets of his old jacket.

"There are three basic body types," Mary recited, "the Viscerotonic . . ."

"That's me, Ralph Graves." I opened another can of beer. "Fond of good food and drink and . . ." I finally took the plunge. . . . "and of beautiful girls

like Mary Peale. Fat. Or at least plump." I looked down at my waistline, which had bulged back to its old proportions during our trip. "No fighter." And here I stared Hugh in the eye. "Unless I'm driven to it, that is."

"The second type's the Cerebrotonic," Mary rushed on. But my heart jumped because she had given me a quick smile.

"That's where I fit," sighed Larry. "All brains, inhibitions and stomach ulcers. Yon Cassius—on a scholarship."

"And the third is the Somatotonic," Mary concluded. "Strong. Fanatical. Practical. Dangerous as a passel of wildcats, especially when teamed with a Cerebrotonic." She looked at Hugh with such adoration that it made my toes wiggle. "Women go nuts about 'em."

"Nuts!" said our All American, grinning all over his face.

"Very well put, Miss Peale." Even the professor had to smile. "You should have added that, thank heaven, there are no pure types. All men and women are mixtures of nine to twelve dominant traits. Ralph is six parts Viscerotonic, two parts Somatotonic . . . he has enough strength to lift beer to his mouth and to move about slowly if the weather isn't too hot . . . and four parts Cerebrotonic. He has a good brain but he detests using it.

"Hugh is a two-five-four. Larry is a two-two-six with two undetermined traits. Watch him for surprises.

"You, Miss Peale, are almost perfectly balanced . . . a four-four-four. That's why I've been using you all year as a 'control' in my experiments with constitutional psychology. But go on from there. I suggest"—he emphasized the last word—"that you have thought for once instead of parroting my lectures. If we're to get out of the mess we're in we need all the original thinking we can get tonight."

"Well, sir . . ." She spoiled her broad low forehead with a terrific frown. "Maybe the mess has come about because the brutal Somatotonics—excuse me, Hugh, but I have to be honest—have ganged up against the other two types. The softening influence of the Viscerotonics—their tolerance and love of life, you know—and the clear thinking of the Cerebrotonics have been suppressed in favor of a militant materialism dominated by the Somatotonics."

"Say!" I crooned. "Maybe you've latched on to something, Mary. We fat fellows have been kicked around for two thousand years. People should put us back in the saddle . . . except that I detest jolting around on top of a horse."

"You're not the Man-on-Horseback type, Ralph," said Gordon, "but you and Miss Peale are on the

CHAPTER VI

As we scrabbled for places among the orange peels and miscellaneous offal of a Roman gutter a searchlight picked up the incoming plane. I saw the bomb bay open and one tiny speck of silver start its leisurely descent.

I covered my head with my arms and tried to melt into the pavement. The air quivered in that eerie way it had when I turned off Route 22 so long ago. Maybe. . . .

Something burst and I bathed in a glare of white light!

The light still was blazing when I recovered con-

sciousness. I pried my cramped arms loose from my head, sat up and opened an eye experimentally.

Rome was still there, dozing under a brilliant sun, but there had been some changes made. The ruins of the Colosseum had vanished. Instead, rows of squalid, five-storey tenements ringed the square. Our hotel had metamorphosed into an imitation Greek temple. Only the street layout was recognizable.

And, over everything, lay a pall of silence so deep that it made my flesh crawl. The city seemed dead.

I shook the others back to life and we took stock of the situation. None of us had been injured but our clothes were a mess and we were filthy.

"Must be a bank holiday," Larry tried to joke after he had ducked his head in a nearby fountain.

"I don't like it," said Hugh. "Reminds me of the day when our group was sent to napalm a troop concentration well behind the red front line in Korea. Not a MIG in sight. Not a single burst of ack-ack until we were right on top of them. Then the gooks let go with everything they had been hiding. Wow! We'd better get out of here before hell pops."

"Where do we get out *to?*" I asked groggily.

Hugh gave me a dirty look and helped Mary to her feet.

"Why it should be mid-morning instead of night, and Spring instead of summer I can't imagine," she

said as she started cleaning herself up at the fountain.

"Precession of the equinoxes, I'd guess, if we really have gone into the past." Larry slicked back his cowlick and squinted at the sun. "About the middle of March, I estimate."

"The middle of March!" Mary pressed both hands to her pale lips for a moment. "If this really is the Ides of March, as Professor Gordon thought it might be, we should go to the Senate right away. Caesar was due there hours ago."

We remembered the maps in the textbooks well enough to find our own way. That was lucky because nobody was around to direct us. The tenement and other house doors were barred. The shops were shuttered tight.

The new, brightly painted marble Senate House was equally deserted. We climbed the broad steps unchallenged and entered to find the Senate Chamber empty too.

Well, not quite empty! A white cat, its fur splotched with red, dashed squalling between our legs as we crossed the threshold.

When we forced ourselves to approach the tribune we found what we had feared—Caesar's body lying there, still dripping blood from more than two score dagger wounds.

" 'And none so poor to do him reverence,' " whis-

pered Larry, quoting Shakespeare as he often does when deeply moved.

"Suetonius told the truth." Mary looked down at the forlorn and yet somehow still magnificent world conqueror with tear-filled eyes. "All Caesar's friends deserted him this morning—left him lying here for hours in the Senate House he had built."

Hugh, having seen death so often, was unshaken.

"Seems to me this marks the failure of a mission," he said crossly. "Lysh should have told us that, when you swap crises, you may reach the first one *after* it has occurred. Now we're stuck here, with no chance of escape or of changing the time stream either."

"At least we're alive!" Larry was angry for the first time I could remember. "Look, you quitter, this particular crisis, or series of crises, lasts for two years—lasts until the republicans are defeated by a technical knockout at the Battle of Philippi. You remember how it happened . . . happens. Cassius is nearsighted, according to Plutarch. At a crucial moment in the fighting he mistakes his own troops for those of Octavian, thinks he's about to be captured and commits suicide. Before that, there may be a hell of a lot we can do to change things."

"That's right!" Hugh lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully, a new light in his hard eyes. "With things hanging in the balance that way, I'll bet a man

who understands modern battle practice . . . a man like me . . ."

"Fancy yourself, don't you?" Larry relaxed a bit. "But here's another point. Granted a man like you enables Cassius to win at Philippi, that would put Rome's republican party in the saddle, wouldn't it?"

"Of course. That's what we want here, according to Lysh. A republic. Democracy. Freedom. Peace. All that guff."

"I'm not so sure." Larry was pacing the tribune now, making a detour every time he passed the corpse. "The conspirators who murdered Caesar *claim* to be republicans . . ."

"But they've degenerated into a bunch of gangsters and cutthroats," I butted in. "Their degeneracy under Crassus, Clodius, and the latter's beautiful, unspeakable sister Clodia, forced Caesar to make his bid for empire so he could put in a decent administration."

"And look what they did to Caesar," Larry backed me up. "They ganged up on him when he was unarmed. That's a trick worthy of Hitler or Mussolini. My hunch is that Cassius plans to set up a ruthless dictatorship and tell the other republicans to go chase themselves."

"Well, why shouldn't he, if he has the power?" Hugh wanted to know.

"I'll go along with what you say about the republicans so far as Cassius is concerned," said Mary as she bent down to close the dead man's great accusing eyes. "He's an unprincipled, ambitious mixture of Cerebrotonic and Somatotonic. But Brutus has equal power in the party and everything indicates he's a pretty decent Viscerotonic."

"Caesar trusted Brutus," Larry conceded. "He said 'Let me have men about me who are fat.' "

"My eye!" I said. "Brutus was no Viscerotonic. What everyone forgets is that Portia had a notion her husband was ailing and had to be pampered. She was always stuffing him with noodles. The fact that he overate to please her wouldn't change his basic psychology. He was . . . I mean he *is* a bad egg just like Cassius, for all his fine phrases."

"Then to whom can we turn?" Mary asked helplessly.

"How about Cicero?" Larry asked. "He hated Caesar. He was vain and sometimes cowardly, but his speeches show he really loved the republic. And he refused to become involved in the assassination plot."

"Cicero's a has-been," Hugh objected. "We should tie up with a strong man."

"Let's take a vote on it," I said after Mary cast me an appealing look. The ballot was three to one in favor of Larry's suggestion.

"What do we do about Caesar's body?" Mary asked then.

"Leave it alone," I said with a shiver. "If we value our hides we'll beat it out of here while we have the chance. Suetonius says three slaves will come along presently and carry him home."

"I've a better idea." Hugh was trying to get back in Mary's good graces. "If you insist on going to Cicero, let's first put the corpse on Cassius' porch and start yelling bloody murder. That will pin the crime right where it belongs. We'll raise a mob in no time."

"No more mob violence," Larry vetoed the proposal. "Rome has had enough of that in the last few years. "We must take the body directly to Cicero and tell him Caesar asked to be brought there with his last breath. That will smoke the old fellow out—make him take a stand for once instead of letting Brutus and Cassius get the bit in their teeth."

"Besides," I agreed, "we're dressed in funny clothes. Our Latin stinks. We don't really know how words are pronounced in these times. If we stick our necks out the way Hugh wants, we'll wind up by getting ourselves crucified like Spartacus."

We took another vote on that. Then we put what was left of mighty Caesar—he was just a little skinny chap who couldn't have weighed more than 150 pounds—on a shield some terrified guard had

dropped behind the tribune. We shouldered our grisly burden, picked up those parcels Gordon had given us, and started out in search of Cicero's town house.

Since there was nobody to ask directions of, we got ourselves hopelessly lost in a maze of deserted, whispering streets leading to the Palatine Hill. We felt thousands of eyes peering at us through drawn curtains, but even the Vigiles had left their beats that wild March morning. Rome lay naked.

Finally Hugh managed to corner an old woman in a blind alley. When he asked the way to Cicero's villa, he pronounced the name "Kickero," as we had been taught in Latin class, and was met by a blank stare. The poor woman was in an ecstasy of terror and kept scuttling right and left in an effort to escape.

He resorted to sign language at last, pantomiming that we wanted to find the home of an important, loud-voiced fat man with a big bald head.

"Ji, ji, ji! Gaius Marcus. Gaius Marcus," she squeaked, pointing a skinny finger. Then she dodged between us and ran like a rabbit.

We staggered up through a grove of dusty green olive trees to the marble portals of an imposing mansion. And all the while those hidden eyes followed our every movement.

We met a bald fat man coming down the steps. He had been going somewhere in a great hurry until he saw what we carried; then he caved in on himself and began sobbing. Even in that characteristic Ciceronian pose he didn't look much like those big-nosed busts I had seen in classroom niches.

After we had placed the shield on the ground, Hugh snatched the limelight. He marched forward, right arm upraised, and cried in his very best Latin: "Kikero, we Caesar's basely-murdered corpse bear."

My heart sank. Even if Cicero wasn't in the assassination plot, he was friendly with the conspirators. Such a flat accusation could put us in a bad spot if it reached the wrong ears.

"Kikero?" floundered the fat man. "You Cicero must mean. Why you here that honey-tongued villain seek?"

The man's accent and topsy-turvey syntax (which I shall imitate no further) stopped Hugh cold for a moment but he quickly recovered, and reversed his field in mid-stride.

"We were told that Cicero lived here," he snapped. "As friends of Caesar, we came to accuse him of this shameful crime to his face."

"That is a brave deed—one few Romans would have dared today. But you are misled. I am no Cicero. I am Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, the sworn

enemy of demagogues and assassins." He was shaking like a leaf but he knelt and pressed his full lips to the high, cold forehead of the corpse.

"That gesture also took courage, on a day when Caesar's enemies ride high," Hugh told him.

"So the jackals have brought down the lion at last," Lepidus said as he rose. "I had just heard there was rioting in the Senate House. I was on my way to offer aid. . . . You say Cicero did this thing?"

Halting over the sonorous Latin phrases, we did our best to set him straight.

"Ignoble!" he muttered as he dried his little eyes on the hem of his purple toga. "And who are you, dressed and talking so strangely, yet daring the wrath of the republicans?

We looked at one another helplessly for a moment. Then Larry spoke up: "We are strangers from Gaul, come to offer our services to Caesar in his war against Parthia. We crave pardon for our bad Latin and barbarous garb."

"Strange!" Lepidus studied us, frowning. "I thought I knew the accents of Gaul, and all its costumes as well. And tell me"—he took his time surveying Mary's trim figure in its scanty white linen dress—"do women come to fight for Caesar too?"

"I came to serve Caesar." She returned his gaze

levelly. "Since he is dead I know not whom to serve."

Gaius Marcus' plump cheeks reddened as though she had slapped them and he bent his head.

"Your pardon. I meant no disrespect. It is only that Roman ladies do not . . ." He pulled himself together. "Come. We are all friends since we seek to avenge Caesar. Let us to his home and break the word to Calpurnia, poor soul. Afterward, you shall be my guests for so long as you care to stay."

"Isn't he *the* Lepidus?" I whispered as our host clapped his hands loudly. "The man who was both soldier and High Priest, like Caesar himself?"

"The same," Larry answered as a group of slaves appeared, picked up the bloody shield at their master's order, and bore Caesar, one arm swinging limply, into the streets again.

"The same, also," said Hugh out of the corner of his mouth, "who was given the runaround by Mark Antony and Octavian after they formed the Second Triumvirate and defeated the republicans at Philippi. He's a weak sister."

"I'm not so sure he's weak," Mary murmured. "He's strongly viscerotonic. No doubt about that. But he's a good soldier, with a fine record as governor of Spain. Maybe . . ."

"Maybe!" he nodded thoughtfully as we all trailed after the cortege.

No wonder Caesar preferred the company of Cleopatra and other beautiful women to that of his wife! Everyone in Rome knew that his marriage had been one of convenience, intended to bring him the support of a powerful aristocratic family in his struggle with the republicans. Yet, when she learned of the murder, big, bony Calpurnia put on a show of rending her garments, tearing her hair and screaming that made us acutely embarrassed.

"Although," said Hugh as we headed for Lepidus' home after the worst of the storm was spent, "I know just how she feels. Yesterday an empress-to-be —today just a rich nobody. I'd scream too!"

"Oh! Do look!" Mary interrupted.

Coming toward us was a startling procession. Surrounded five-deep by glistening Nubian warriors, a woman was being hurried through the streets in a litter draped with silks of clashing, barbaric colors. By her side rode an armored Roman on a black charger.

"Some friend of Caesar, heading for the tall timber," I said to Hugh.

He didn't answer . . . just stood stock-still and stared. And well he might! She was a golden woman, proudly naked to the waist in the Egyptian fashion frowned upon in outwardly puritanical Rome.

Her lovely neck and arms were unadorned but her

wealth of dusky auburn hair was surmounted by the jeweled lotus crown of Isis. She stared straight ahead, the fear of death—and the contempt of it—stamped large on her proud oval face.

"Cleopatra!" Hugh choked. "But that's impossible here."

"No it isn't," I corrected. "Cleopatra made a state visit to Rome in the Spring of 44. Created quite a scandal. The republicans charged she was Caesar's mistress and tried to stir up riots against him. But he was so popular with the plebes that they got nowhere."

"Who's the big lug on the horse?" Hugh's eyes were feral slits.

The "big lug" recognized Lepidus at that moment and spurred toward him.

"Marcus Aemilius," he bellowed, "I didn't think to meet you in the streets today. Do you think it wise to be abroad?"

"Wiser than for you to be seen escorting the Queen of Egypt, Marcus Antonius." Lepidus puffed forward and kissed the slim brown hand that Cleopatra extended. "The mobs will be out any hour now."

"I have arranged a truce until after the funeral," said Mark Antony grandly. Then, spying the four of us, "Who are these outlanders?"

"Friends of Caesar's. I met them carrying his body from the Senate."

"Oh." Antony's straight black brows drew together and his matinee idol face flushed. "I had hoped to have that honor, but Brutus was urgent."

"What game have you been playing with Brutus and his republicans?" Lepidus demanded.

"I had to grovel before those assassins to save our lives and obtain safe conduct for the Queen to her ship," Antony snarled, showing a mouthful of big white teeth. "But I have outwitted them. Brutus agreed to let me speak at Caesar's funeral—after he has spoken, of course. I had feared he would ask Cicero to make the oration. Hah! Brutus is no Cicero!"

"Not so loud, boy. Do you want us all massacred?" To break the tension, Lepidus turned to Cleopatra. "May Isis and Osiris give Your Majesty a pleasant voyage home."

"Cleopatra shall have no more pleasant voyages," she answered with a voice like a viol. "Her Caesar is dead." She signed for the Nubians to resume their march, then leaned back against the cushions and closed those disturbing golden eyes.

"What a woman, what a woman!" Hugh muttered as we watched her go in the direction of the quays.

"Take it easy," I grinned. "She's Antony's."

"Not yet, Ralph." Abstractedly, he pulled out a cigarette and started to light it. I knocked the match out of his hand. This was no time for tricks of magic.

We held a council that evening in the guest house that friend Lepidus maintained in his walled garden. By this time we had bathed . . . with the giggling help of female slaves . . . dined, rested for several hours and changed into Roman dress. The tunic does something for a plump figure, I had to admit. A toga, with its voluminous folds, would have been even better. Not being a citizen, however, that costume was denied me.

"We're all set," Larry said, starting the discussion. "We're in the middle of things, now that we have become clients of Lepidus. Also, we have the advantage because we know exactly what's going to happen at the funeral tomorrow."

"Maybe our interference already has changed the course of events," Mary suggested as she studied her flowing robes with disfavor in a bronze mirror and struggled with their clumsy fastenings.

"That's doubtful," I disagreed, "but we'll have to be mighty careful from now on. For example, if we should do something to make Antony flub his oration at the funeral, there may be no battle of Philippi. We ought to study the whole situation before we make a single move."

"Hah!" Hugh snorted an excellent imitation of Mark Antony. He was playing with a jeweled dagger instead of giving the usual attention to Mary.

"What's the matter with you, Hugh?" She looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"Nothing. I was just thinking."

"We're in the same position as the prince whose fairy godmother granted him one wish," said Larry. "If he doesn't wish for the right thing, he never has another chance."

"Well, what *do* we wish for?" Mary asked. "We seem to have joined forces, willy nilly, with Lepidus and his crowd. Is that really what we want? Don't forget that our freedom of choice becomes more limited with every hour we hesitate."

"Maybe we can build up Lepidus," I hazarded. "If he took the leadership of Caesar's faction until Octavian gets here a lot of blood, sweat and tears might be avoided."

"Rot!" Hugh was staring out at the stars in the direction of Egypt. "Lepidus is a broken reed. Mark Antony can twist him around his finger."

"All right, then," I said. "Look at it from the other direction. Say we decide to change sides, team up with the republicans and try to reform them. What have they got? Three Cerebrotonics, Cassius, Brutus and Cicero, as leaders. No temperamental balance there at all. They'll make a real mess of things if they come out on top."

"Maybe we could consolidate the two factions," suggested Larry, the eternal compromiser. "That

would balance the temperaments okay. But how are we going to do anything as big as that before Antony stirs up the mob tomorrow and makes a common front impossible? This looks utterly hopeless."

"Aren't we forgetting something?" Mary asked as she put the mirror aside. "I mean those packages that Professor Gordon gave us. Perhaps they will help."

"Good idea," I said with a sigh of relief. "What's in yours?"

CHAPTER VII

Mary broke the cords, removed the wrappings, opened a brightly tinted cardboard box, then sank onto a couch and began to giggle.

"Well?" we demanded.

"A huge bottle of Chanel Number 5 perfume," she enumerated. "Twelve pairs of nylon hose. A makeup kit. A gold lame dress . . . and some black silk underthings. Why on earth? Professor Gordon must have been out of his mind."

Hugh paraphrased:

" 'Daily she went about the Roman city.
Black underclothes of crepe de chine she wore,

So that, in each back yard, she viewed with pity
The short and simple flannels of the poor.'

"That is, providing Romans wear flannels," he added between shouts of laughter. "The old goat!"

"Now, Hugh!" Mary blushed scarlet. "The professor must have had a reason for giving me this. Larry, what did you receive?"

"A Lincoln Library of Essential Information," he chortled after the wrappings were off. "That's more like it. I'll bet we could almost reconstruct modern civilization with this one-volume encyclopedia."

"*If* we had the materials, the machine tools and the well-skilled workmen," Hugh jeered. "Hero of Alexandria invented the steam turbine two centuries ago, remember. But just try to get Roman slave labor to build a big one for you."

"Smart guy." Larry was miffed. "Why don't you open your gift?"

"I already did. It contained a thousand dollars in gold, a biography of P. T. Barnum and a . . ." He stopped.

"And a what?" Mary prompted.

"Huh? Oh, nothing else. Guess I came out ahead of the game at that. Wonder where Gordon got that much gold. And why did he put in that idiotic book. For padding or something?"

They watched as I fumbled with my oblong box.

I got it open . . . and held up a gallon tin can marked *pure grain alcohol.*

"Think we ought to wake up Marcus Aemilius, give him a few drinks and sell him on our consolidation idea?" Larry asked when we had recovered our breaths. "What do you say, Treasurer?"

"You three go," Hugh yawned. "I'm no good at compromising. Also, I started reading about Barnum's Cardiff Giant hoax a while ago. Think I'll finish the chapter and turn in."

Lepidus wasn't asleep. We found him closeted with Mark Antony.

The big fellow, who was cradling a flagon of wine, greeted us surlily and returned to the topic of their interrupted conversation.

"By Jupiter Capitolinus," he swore, "tomorrow's speech is a hard one to write. On the surface, the mob will be with the republicans because they're on top."

"I know," Lepidus agreed. "The Roman people are not what they were when they stopped Hannibal." (The trouble with Marcus Aemilius was that he found himself an honest man surrounded by power-hungry adventurers and a populace softened by good living. He was just as worried as we were about the way things were shaping up.)

"I've got to start by buttering up Brutus," Antony went on as he took another swig from the bottle. "But the people really loved Caesar—still love him,

with dead Caesar to witness," cried the false Octavian. "Let the gods decide if I am an impostor."

Antony regained his poise in a twinkling. If there was one thing he prided himself on most, it was his prowess as a wrestler. Ripping off his black toga, he sprang down the steps of the Rostrum.

Hugh dismounted and allowed a centurion to remove his armor. They stood forth then, in their tunics, two big men. Antony was taller by half a head and at least twenty pounds heavier.

They circled while onlookers, slaves, plebes and patricians, clawed one another for points of vantage. Then Antony lunged, wide open, like a bear!

Hugh caught one of those treelike arms. He bent forward. The noble Roman consul shot over his head and landed on the cobblestones with a thud like that of a dropped sack of coal.

"Air Force jujitsu," chortled Larry. "Lordy. Lordy. Watch modern education pay off!"

Antony was up in a moment, his face contorted. This time he was more cautious. He feinted, managed to catch Hugh's right arm in a hammer lock. We heard the muscles crack. I caught my breath.

"Hugh!" screamed Mary. "Hugh! Kill the big ox!" Her face was white.

Hugh did a back flip and reversed the grip. Mark

went flying, landed on his beautiful Roman nose, and took his time getting up as the crowd cheered his opponent.

Shaking his bloody head, he made as if to lunge, then leaped back and kicked at Hugh's chin with his heavy red sandal. No holds barred in Roman wrestling!

The blow missed as Hugh dodged; before we could think, Antony was caught in a toe lock.

He soared, yelling in agony, went down . . . and stayed down.

"Now," said Hugh to the enchanted populace, "I shall read you dear dead Caesar's will." He dusted his hands delicately and mounted the Rostrum.

"Looks as if our team won," Larry crowed. "Shall we help Hugh pull down the goal posts?" He started to move forward.

"Wait!" said Mary. "I'm not so sure. What do you think, Ralph?" It was the first time she had ever asked my opinion on an important matter.

"If Hugh had let us in on this, I'd be with him all the way," I answered. "But he pulled a sneak play. I don't like it. Let's string along with Lepidus a while longer."

Mary nodded with a tinge of regret. Larry did likewise.

So we didn't wait to hear Hugh pirate the rest of

Antony's speech or to see the mob pile benches over Caesar's corpse to make the tallest funeral pyre in Roman history. With a perspiring Lepidus in the lead, we went away from there in a great hurry.

CHAPTER VIII

We foregathered that evening, republicans and imperialists together, at Marcus Tullius Cicero's estate in Arpinum. To be more exact, we invaded the orator's birthplace which his young heiress wife, Publia, had remodeled.

"Must have cost her three and a half million sesterces," Lepidus told us spitefully as we rode up the cypress-bordered road toward the villa. "Yet the smoke has it the old fool is about to divorce Publia. She doesn't boss him around the way his first wife, Terentia, did. He's utterly miserable."

Because of the strained domestic atmosphere,

plus the fact that the March wind had risen to near-hurricane proportions, the sprawling marble villa typified "any place in a storm" for all of us in more ways than one.

We were nine at dinner, according to the inflexible Roman custom. Antony was there, with a black eye, a skinned proboscis and a strained back. So were Brutus, Cassius, Cicero, the stormy-eyed, pouting Publia, and the four of us. Forced into an uneasy alliance by the false Octavian's coup, members of the two factions walked around each other stiff-legged, like hostile hounds. At any moment I expected to see daggers flash in the lamplight.

"Isn't Cicero wonderful?" Mary whispered at me once.

"What's wonderful about him?" I had taken a dislike to the pompous, paunchy old man. He reminded me too much of what I might become in another forty years.

"He talks in quotation marks," she giggled as she fussed with her disfiguring robes. "Just listen to him."

Cicero was striding up and down amidst the gaudily-painted Greek statuary in the peristylum, timing his words to the splash of rain through the central roof opening into the large tank sunk into the floor.

"What a time! What a civilization," he thundered

to the assembly. "Any excuse will serve a tyrant. You may share the labors of the great, but you will not share the spoil.

"I do not purchase regret at such a price," he ranted on after the polite applause had died down. "How fortunate I was to have been born to be a Roman consul in the good old days. Fortune watches over our lives. He who strives will find his gods strive for him equally. Danger gleams, like sunshine, to a brave man's eyes."

"Mine are a bit out of focus just now," Antony cracked.

"United we stand, divided we fall," came the next fantastic phrase. "Where there's life, there's hope! As for me, I will raise a storm of words and rain a very tempest of abuse upon the usurper. And, if I fail, let me die in the country which I have often served."

"Didn't I tell you?" whispered Mary. "He's unique."

"He managed to crib from Aesop, Demosthenes, Euripides, Aristophanes and even from himself in that one short speech." I grinned. "No wonder he's popular, and vice versa."

"Dinner is served," a slave announced.

As we trooped into the triclinium Mary caught my arm.

"Ralph," she said, "You'll be our spokesman."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Larry's a dreamer. He's not up to it. I'm under the handicap of being a woman. So stiffen the old backbone, will you? For my sake?"

"Sure," I gulped. "Anything *you* say, Mary."

In the triclinium we found three deeply cushioned divans drawn up in a "C" around a small, highly polished round table. We were seated—or rather, laid out—according to what the host considered our importance. Brutus, Cassius and Antony were placed at the right hand couch in that order of precedence, to Antony's extreme annoyance.

On the middle divan were Larry, Mary and then Cicero himself in the coveted Consul's seat. He said he was there because he expected urgent dispatches from Rome but, I suspected, it was because he wanted to talk to a pretty stranger.

Finally, on the despised left, was Publia, in the host's usual place, my humble self and, in the least place of all, poor Lepidus.

Marcus Aemilius turned scarlet at the studied insult.

"I'll sue the old fool," he kept muttering. "I'll sue him tomorrow for this. And I'll collect, too, in any court. Placed in the same seat where the riff-raff of Rome is dragged in from the street to make up a 'nine'! Oh, why did I ever come here?" The rest of his remarks I won't translate!

Conversation languished while one group of slaves removed our sandals, another provided us with napkins and basins of water to wash our hands, and a third brought in the gustatio, or hors d'oeuvres.

Cassius, who should have been wearing a black hat like the TV villains, told Brutus what a marvelous speech he had made.

Cicero cooed at Mary while his estranged wife glared.

Antony was in the midst of explaining how he had been fouled by Octavian when a slave spilled a cup of honeyed wine on his purple-paneled tunic. The consul scrambled to his feet, knocked the slave across the room, and was only quieted when Cicero and Publia apologized profusely.

Mary looked at me across the table.

"There's a blowup due any second," she whispered, and added, "Did you bring that bottle?"

I rolled over and favored Publia with one of my best smiles. Her handsome, hawk-nosed face, surmounted by an elaborate coiffure made of hundreds of tiny curls, resembled one of the storm clouds overhead as she saw the dinner party collapsing.

"Madame," I asked, "does a stranger dare make a suggestion which may enliven your banquet?"

"Enliven it!" she hissed. "Resurrect it, mean you? I told Marcus Tullius . . ." She bit her full lips. "What is your suggestion?"

"I brought with me from Gaul a wonderful new additive for wine. We provincials find it effective in relaxing tensions. May I prepare a draught for your approval?"

She was a woman of affairs, despite her youth, and used to making quick decisions.

"Come with me to the kitchens," she said. "I must see that that clumsy slave is properly flogged for spilling the wine. Bring your additive. I'm in a mood to try anything, even poison, before blood is spilled also."

Publia rose from the couch with the grace of a falcon. I followed her example much more awkwardly —try it sometime when you're involved in a tunic— found the alcohol in our gear and proceeded to the kitchens.

The slave already was being attended to by a chamberlain who swung a many-lashed scourge with gusto.

"Mistress, mistress!" blubbered the lad, a Greek by his looks. "Have mercy!" His voice rose to a shriek.

"Be silent," Publia snapped, "before I have you thrown alive to the carp in the fish pond. A diet of human flesh improves their flavor."

Mercifully, we went on to the wine cellar. There, with the help of another cringing slave, I located an amphora of something resembling dry vermouth.

I mixed the wine, alcohol, and some hardpacked snow which wealthy Romans bring from the moun-

tains to ice their drinks. I stirred gently, remembering with some trepidation those potent drinks Gordon and I had mixed in the time machine. I poured the result into silver cups, tossed in two black olives and sipped to prove the stuff was not poisonous.

"Try a Black Disaster, Mistress Publia," I implored, presenting the second cup to my hostess.

"It burns!" was her first startled comment. Then, after a moment: "Why, this is excellent, stranger. Prepare more of it for our guests. I shall be the talk of all the cats in Rome tomorrow for this potion."

To understand what follows, remember that most Romans of that era had not discovered the doubtful blessings of distilled spirits. Oh, they did make a bit of brandy; but the usual drink was wine mixed with water, honey, spices and other dreadful things. They guzzled huge quantities of such pap, but nobody got drunk until he had consumed five or more flagons.

Tonight, things were different. By the time the fish, the roasted peacock . . . served in its splendid skin and feathers . . . and the many rich desserts had come and gone, Cicero had his arm around Lepidus' shoulders. Brutus was trying to make a date with Mary. And Mark Antony was telling Cassius that their mutual interest in Etruscan pottery made them blood brothers.

After the endless meal ended we sang some of Sappho's odes. I particularly like the one that begins: "I

loved thee, Athis, once, long, long ago." And the staid Publia, who was one jump ahead of the rest, of course, put on a diaphanous Serician tissue and obliged with an Egyptian temple dance.

"I think I'll keep the bitch after all," Cicero purred after his wife received a tremendous ovation. "Didn't know she had it in her."

"Ralph, you were wonderful!" Mary squeezed my hand as we ambled back into the "parlor" at last.

"Thank Professor Gordon," I answered, "and pray that the alky holds out. It's getting confoundly low. . . . And Mary . . ."

"Yes?" Her sweet eyes warmed me to the tips of my toes.

"I'm in love."

"With Publia?" she teased.

"With you."

"Oh!" Her hands crept to her throat.

"Hugh is a big punk. He'll make you miserable."

"I know he will." She tiptoed to kiss my cheek. "You're sweet. But now behave yourself. We have business to attend to."

As we were taking seats around the pool a slave handed a set of waxed tablets to Cicero. Our host broke the binding string, read, and puffed his cheeks with rage.

"Your friend," he glared in turn at Larry, Mary and me, "is losing no time. Listen to this proclama-

tion from the last edition of the *Acta Diurna*." He read:

" 'Romans! Be of good cheer. Your Octavian has returned. Disperse to your homes. Tomorrow there will be a distribution of two gold aurei and an extra measure of wheat to each citizen.' "

"Eight dollars each," I whistled. "Hugh must have the keys to the treasury." Then to Larry: "But what's the *Acta Diurna*?"

"It's Rome's newspaper, the *Daily Doings*," answered our antiquarian. "News comes in from all parts of the empire by heliograph. Such items, along with advertisements for lotteries, the games with wild animals, and the latest gossip, are posted on the pillars of public buildings. Slaves of the patricians hang around, make copies of the various editions and rush them to their masters. Quite a scandal sheet, I've heard. If the worst comes, maybe you can get a job on it."

That proclamation settled it.

"I made a regular ass of myself by opposing Caesar," Cicero admitted. "Tomorrow I will go to the Senate and make a speech proposing amnesty for the assassins and the setting up of a coalition government."

"What happens when the real Octavian arrives?" Cassius asked with a twist of his thin lips.

"He is an excellent youth who must be praised—and sent to another place," Cicero replied.

"I presume you will choose me to head the government." Brutus preened his fat self.

"Excuse me," I said, "but the matter of leadership should be decided after we find whether we have anybody to lead. I suggest that first we sign a document affirming that we are all friends and that we pledge ourselves to fight to the death against the false Octavian."

The upshot was that republicans and imperialists pricked their fingers and signed their names to the document which Cicero drew up according to the old Phoenician pirate custom. Which, as Mary murmured in my ear, was right and proper since most of them were freebooters.

Then, just as Larry, who was in one of his rare glows, was teaching the company to sing "Auld Lang Syne" another slave—there seemed to be hundreds of them—came dashing in.

"Master," he gabbled. "There is one without who would have audience. He has troops at his back."

While Cicero dithered, Antony shouldered his way forward.

"I have my personal Legion quartered nearby," he roared. "I shall order an attack."

I looked at Lepidus and shook my head violently.

"Peace!" cried our patron. "We shall never regain

Rome by a skirmish in the dark. Let the man come. Hear what he has to offer."

His counsel prevailed.

"Hail!" Hugh shouted as he came stamping in a few minutes later, making the rain drops fly from his sagum as he tossed that garment to a slave. "You're all holed up here, are you? I should have brought my entire force and scotched you for good."

I stared at him, hardly believing my eyes. This wasn't the Hugh we had known at Hutter. He carried himself like a ramrod. His chest and lower jaw stuck out a foot. There was a downward quirk to the corners of his mouth.

Good gosh, I thought, *he's become a Somatomaniac!*

"I won't be talked to so in my own home," Cicero thundered belatedly.

"You once said 'there is no place like home,' " Hugh sneered, "so why not talk turkey here? First, though, I would have a word alone with my friends."

"We want no word alone with you," Mary spoke up, "unless you stop this clowning."

"So?" He shifted into English. "I'm offering you important posts in my government."

"As equals?" Larry asked.

"Equals!" Hugh snorted. "Too late for that. You ran out on me at the Forum. No. I'm the only man left who can put civilization back on the right track. I

have a mission from Prof Gordon. I want you to act as my minister of science and Ralph as minister of propaganda."

"Rot!" I used his favorite expression deliberately. "And Mary?"

"Oh, she can be minister of education or something."

"Not your empress?" she asked softly.

"Well . . . uh . . ." He flinched and I remembered his encounter with Cleopatra. "I'm afraid our engagement's off, Mary. A man in my position is, well . . ." He straightened a tie that wasn't there.

"That's all I wanted to know," she said.

"Hugh . . ." I reverted to Latin for the benefit of the others, who were muttering and fingering their daggers, "you're in a spot and you know it. In the first place, you're not the proper somatype to bring peace to the world. With your knowledge of engineering we'll have atom bombs dropping in twenty instead of two thousand years.

"Secondly, these gentlemen have just signed a pact to hunt you down. You have Rome, yes. But you control only one Legion plus the ragtag and bobtail which have come into town to recruit for the Parthian war. Antony has a veteran Legion under his command—six thousand fine troops. Octavian will be here in a few days with three more Legions. You'll be isolated. Why don't you join forces with us?

I'm sure you'll be given a high post in the coalition government. Then we really can start building a decent world."

"Viscerotonic wish fulfillment," he scoffed. "These —jackals, didn't Lepidus call them—can't build a chicken coop. I'm the world's hope."

"There speaks Caesar's ghost," yelped Cicero. "Crimes are not to be measured by the issue of events, but from the bad intentions of men."

"Still another honorable man," snarled Antony. Hand on sword, he was inching forward.

"Hugh, you're talking just like a Hitler or Mussolini." Larry made one last desperate appeal. "I can practically see your head swelling. Come off your high horse. Don't you know you can't win?"

"Think not?" Hugh's eyes had an animal gleam. "You forget my knowledge of engineering."

Antony sprang!

Hugh's hand flashed to his belt. Six pistol shots rang out like the rattle of a stick along a board fence.

The first bullet sent Antony reeling. The others extinguished five lamps that illuminated the room.

Before slaves could scurry in with other lights, Hugh, and Gordon's third gift to him, had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

Mark had a nasty bullet crease along his skull to add to his other wounds. By the time we had bandaged him and convinced him that he hadn't been killed we were all cold sober and fighting mad, even to the easy-going Lepidus. Perhaps I should except Brutus, who had been reduced to inarticulate burbling by the events of the evening.

"My plans. My beautiful plans," he kept wailing as he wrung his beringed hands. "All upset again. I thought that when we put Caesar out of the way everything would be . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" Cassius yelled at him finally.

"Pull yourself together, Marcus Junius. Assassins should be made of sterner stuff.

"Now," he continued, giving Lepidus one of his best lean and hungry looks, "I want an explanation. These strangers are not from Gaul. What part of Hell do they really come from?"

"Speak, Gaius Laurentius," commanded our protector.

"And who may this Gaius Laurentius be?" Cassius snapped.

"I am an engineer—a worker with metals and levers like Archimedes," Larry answered as he straightened out his kinks and lighted a cigarette to the consternation of the Romans. "Also I work with those atoms of which Democritus and Lucretius have told you. In other words, I work miracles.

"As I convinced Gaius Marcus Aemilius earlier, my friends and I have traveled through time, much as you might travel from Rome to Arpinum, to save our world from destruction by helping you to solve your problems if you will let us."

"A likely story," sneered Cassius.

"Let him finish, Gaius Cassius Longinus!" Cicero was leaning forward intently. "My philosophical studies with the New Academy have taught me always to keep an open mind. Why shouldn't it be possible to mount time's horse?"

The others nodded agreement. Whatever else may

be said of them, they were all intelligent, well educated, and grounded in the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies.

Feeling his way carefully, Larry spelled out the situation in words they could grasp while Mary and I backed him up wherever we could. With Cicero in the van, they soon grasped the essentials.

"Unfortunately, Professor Gordon's scheme seems to have misfired," Larry finished at last. "Hugh saw an opportunity to seize power. He took it, just as any one of you would have done, under his circumstances."

"No!" cried Brutus.

"Of course," Cassius nodded. "What was it the false Octavian said at Caesar's funeral? 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. . . .' That is great poetry, gentlemen."

"He stole it," said Larry, "from a British playwright who has not yet been born."

"But . . ." Cicero's brilliant old mind was wrestling with the unfamiliar time track idea. "But now that your Hugh has used his foreknowledge to successfully put his head in the Roman wolf's mouth, he may have trouble drawing it out. Having changed one event he no longer can predict others with accuracy."

"That's correct," I answered. "In fact, Hugh is

now at a double disadvantage because he also must act according to the limitations of his somatype. We, being of many different temperaments, can move in various ways to confuse and block him. Democracy is full of variety and disorder. That is all to the good in this situation."

"What is this magic he has that made him able to defeat me at the Forum and strike me at a distance tonight?" Antony husked.

We had more explaining to do, but finally got across a faint inkling of the wonders of twentieth century science.

"If the usurper knows how to build such marvels," sighed Lepidus, "we might as well go into exile at once. I know a pleasant island near Lesbos."

"I'm sick of exile," Cicero disagreed. "Its essentials are bad food, bad housing and bugs in the beds. Also, as president of the College of Augurs, I know full well it takes time to manufacture even the simplest of miracles. If we act quickly we may be able to circumvent the false Octavian."

"You say his type has certain weaknesses?" Cassius pulled his nose thoughtfully. "Tell us more about this."

"A bit of wine might whet our understanding," Antony hinted broadly. He must have had two hollow legs.

After the potent Flanerian had been brought in

"When two augurs get together they should wink at each other." Cicero suited action to word. "We are all in this together, now, even if the sky should fall. I would not have us delay matters to see whether or not a flock of sacred chickens will or will not eat." He stretched out his arms in a grandiloquent gesture. "Refrain from peering into the future. Out upon you."

"Your brother, Quintus Tullius, was right when he said that 'One orator in a family is enough—nay even in a city,'" Lepidus said wryly as he heaved himself to his feet. *"Morituri Salutamus!"*

CHAPTER X

For endless miserable hours we sloshed along the stone-paved Appian Way. Then, using a tangle of muddy byroads, we cut across the Campagna plain toward the city as rain squalls alternated with periods of wan moonlight.

What I saw by this fitful illumination gave me the creeps. The countryside as a whole presented a picture of neglect and decay. Land which, in the days of Cincinnatus, had supported a dense population, was overgrown with weeds and brambles. Peasant huts stood tenantless. In sharp contrast, occasional

gleaming villas, surrounded by rolling acres of olive groves, vineyards and well-tended fields, indicated that patrician families were making excellent use of slave labor.

"*Sic transit gloria mundi.*" Mary shivered. "Rome is dying at the grass roots, as I told Mark Antony. Freemen can't compete with slaves. They've moved into town to live on handouts."

" 'Wealth accumulates and men decay,' " I capped her quote. "And, as a result, Rome is enjoying a building boom."

As if to confirm this, we galloped past a van loaded with bricks and barrels of cement. The clumsy thing was hitched . . . for the love of heaven! . . . to eight suffering horses by their tails.

"It's obvious you don't have an SPCA here," I said to Lepidus. "Don't you know about horse collars and hames either?"

"Those words are unfamiliar," he said defensively. "As for the tail hitch, it is the best we have found. We tried placing ox yokes on horses but they choked the poor creatures."

"Something else for us to 'invent'," I said. "We can increase the power of Rome's draught animals four times almost overnight."

The trip became worse as we proceeded. Mary, soaked to the skin, rode along looking like her own ghost; Lepidus developed a hangover headache. My

beast took fiendish delight in trying to pinch my legs against stone walls or ancient tombs.

"Gordon's wrong again," I muttered. "Man on horseback. That's me!"

When we reached the workers' district in the southern part of Rome things became even more unpleasant, if possible. The five- and six-story tenements exhaled a stink that turned my stomach. Garbage swirled in the gutters with the waters of the flooded Tiber. From time to time a gale would rip loose tiles from the crazy roofs and send them showering about us like brickbats.

"We're rebuilding this entire district," Lepidus apologized to Mary. "Rome will be a beautiful town when it's finished."

"That's what we say about the slums of New York and Chicago," she said, smiling faintly.

Ahead of us we heard a tremendous roar. Approaching the sound we saw, in the dawnlight, that one of those awful buildings had suddenly collapsed of its own weight. Hideous screams split the air. Dust rose in a tall pillar.

"Come on!" I yelled. "We've got to help those poor people."

"No!" Lepidus commanded. "Stay on your horse. The vigiles should be here soon, along with guards sent by the insurance companies. They start racing the looters as soon as they hear the noise."

"Does this happen often?" Mary was flabbergasted.

"Once or twice a week. These are temporary buildings and not constructed as well as I might wish. As I said, we're planning to . . ."

A long howl echoed from an alley to our left. It was picked up by dozens of others. Toward us came pouring a mob of half-starved, half-clothed creatures brandishing torches, staves and knives.

"Follow me!" Lepidus shouted. "The looters have arrived first. Ride them down if need be."

Since the collapsed tenement blocked the street ahead, we jerked the heads of our jaded steeds around and charged the mob.

I can hardly bear to think of the next few minutes' work. Drawing our swords, we placed Mary's horse between ours. Soon we were slashing unmercifully at horrors who crowded in on us from every side. Dozens of them. Hundreds eventually.

Once I was almost pulled to the ground when a black claw fastened itself on my ankle. (Mary steadied me until I kicked free.) Once I cut down a giant with dirty yellow braids as he attempted to hamstring Lepidus' horse. And once the general rode down a screaming crone as she thrust a flaming torch at Mary's face. Ugh! The sounds were those of slaughtering time at a stockyard.

Then, mercifully, we heard the echoing tramp of approaching vigiles. The mob heard it too and dis-

solved—vanished into its warrens like wisps of nightmare. The street lay empty again.

"To the left!" Lepidus pointed toward a side street. "If the vigiles catch us we'll be worse off than before. They'll want huge bribes if they don't throw us into some stinking jail."

It was with sighs of thanksgiving that we reached the banks of the yellow Tiber half an hour later. With the help of a handful of denari, Lepidus persuaded a boatman to ferry us to the Egyptian ships that lay half-hidden in the fog and rain.

There was bitter argument when our pilot tried to board a great barge with furled crimson sails and silver oars. The general's credentials finally got us on deck and surrounded by a group of seven-foot Nubians with drawn scimitars. After further argument and an interminable wait we were allowed to back into Cleopatra's august presence.

"Ah, Marcus Aemilius," the queen cried when she recognized the general. "Forgive us. Spies are all about. Had you told us you were coming we should have prepared a suitable reception."

"Hail, Majesty!" He gave her a grumpy straight arm salute. "I, too, would that we had met under better auspices. I . . ." he fumbled for the proper ceremonial phrases. "I trust you are well."

"Cleopatra is immortal. She is always well!" Those magnificent eyes flashed fire.

The fact of the matter was that Cleopatra didn't look at all well. She was a sad sight indeed as she sat in huddled splendor amidst smoking charcoal braziers that hardly took the March chill off the draughty cabin. Neither could those banks of flowers cover the smell of mildew, or the sobbing of hidden cithari drown the roar of the storm. Even so, I had to admit, the Queen of the Nile remained beautiful, though pale and all too obviously covered with goose pimples.

What does one talk about to Majesty, especially when one's motives may be suspect? In this case, after the ceremonious exchange of introductions had ended, we tried to break the ice by discussing the weather.

"Rome is worse than the infernal regions of your Avernus," she wailed, hugging those lovely breasts and shivering. "Cleopatra has been half-frozen ever since she arrived in Rome. How do you manage to exist?"

"We wear plenty of clothing in bad weather," frowned Lepidus. (He had three woolen tunics under his soaking toga.) "If I may be so bold, Your Majesty . . ."

"Ha! That is what our poor dead Caesar said," she cried. "Always telling Cleopatra to cover herself. Know you!" She dropped her arms and straightened imperiously while my heart did a flip flop.

"Clothes are made only to disguise ugly bodies. Cleopatra is the light of the world. Her statue stands in your own Temple of Venus. She would not be caught mummified in a baggy stola."

"May I beg to differ with Your Magnificence?" Mary spoke up. "Clothes need not be thick and lumpy to be warm. Look!" She dipped into Professor Gordon's gift box, now considerably the worse for wear, and brought forth a pair of shimmering nylons.

The queen drew in her breath with wonder.

"Exquisite!" She leaned forward and forgot to speak in the third person. "I did not know the looms of Sericane produced such gossamers."

"Put them on," Mary cajoled her. "See how warm and flattering they are."

"Flattering!" The queen's face went cold and her voice snapped like a whip. "Cleopatra's legs are long and perfectly moulded. They need no flattery."

"Forgive me." Calm as a cucumber, Mary folded the nylons and started to put them back in the box.

"No. Wait!" Now the Egyptian was a little girl from whom a sweet is being taken. "You say they're warm also. Let me . . . us . . . just try them."

After we had been regaled by the sight of stockings being put on legs that might be destined to sink a thousand ships at the battle of Actium, Mary winked at me and shook out a black silk negligee.

"Try this too," she coaxed.

The queen was as delighted as a child. (She really was twenty-four and the mother of Caesar's only son.) She preened herself in the garment; clapped for slaves to bring mirrors; slid her hands lovingly down her slim flanks; pirouetted; gave her hand to Mary to kiss.

"You shall become a member of my household," she announced. "Otherwise I must have you killed before you show these things to others."

"Later, perhaps," Mary answered with a double meaning. "Meanwhile, here is another gift from the far future, made by genii solely for the Queen of Egypt."

The Chanel Number 5 she presented brought a squeal of delight. And no wonder! The crude perfumes of Roman times were "fixed" with olive oil instead of alcohol. They were greasy messes that turned rancid almost as soon as applied.

Last out of the box came the makeup kit. Under Mary's ministrations our gypsy lost her pale, oily look and assumed a splendor that made even old Lepidus breathe rapidly. By the time her reconstruction was complete she had joined our cause, though she tried not to show it.

"Cleopatra has been told to beware of Romans, as well as of Greeks, who come bearing gifts," she said

at last. "There must be a new conspiracy afoot. What part would you have me play in it?"

When we explained the situation and begged her to station her Nubians around the Emporium district she looked grave and suddenly every inch a queen.

"The usurper—if, as you say, he is not Octavian—has asked me to receive him," she hesitated. "Little Egypt must be careful not to offend mighty Rome. Why do you think you can defeat the false Octavian?"

This was the hard part. As tactfully as I could I explained that we had come from the future, bearing miracles. I half-expected her to laugh at me but she listened intently.

"Two thousand years," she whispered at last, her eyes big as saucers. "That is about the time when our mummified body should return to life. Has it done so yet?"

"Not yet," Mary assured her solemnly, "but we are expecting it to do so any year now, and have made all arrangements for you to resume your reign."

"Ah!" Cleopatra was radiant. "It may sound sacrilegious but we have often worried about whether our resurrection would be properly arranged. It is such a relief to find it in good hands.

"And you can perform miracles . . ." She sat lost in thought, stroking her rounded, nyloned knees. "Then, if you will guarantee the freedom of our

country and . . ." She sniffed the Chanel. "If you will send that handsome Mark Antony to console us for the death of our Caesar, Cleopatra shall deploy her troops as you request."

As we gave our joint promise she clapped her little brown hands. Slaves appeared in droves from behind curtains where they undoubtedly had been eavesdropping.

"Prepare a great feast for our noble guests," she commanded. To us she added: "We had not thought ever to eat again because of our sorrow, but now that we are warm, the pangs of hunger do begin to intrude."

So it was that we became the first official delegation in the world's history to dine in state with a queen wearing nothing but hose, a negligee . . . and a lotus crown.

CHAPTER XI

In the week that followed we all worked, practically without sleep, behind a screen of impassive ebony warriors. First, we chose a big barn of a place in the center of the smoke-laden Emporium district as our headquarters. Then we looked around for workmen, supplies, tools, forges and such other machinery as was available.

"I can impress an army of slaves for you," Lepidus volunteered. "Greeks and Jews, especially, are clever at menial labor."

"No," I said. "Labor isn't menial, in the first place. Also, slaves have no incentive to do careful work.

They break things. Even the cruelest overseer can't keep them from loafing on the job. One big reason people in the southern part of my country lost a Civil War was that they had to use slow mules instead of fast horses to transport their supplies. Only mules could survive the bad treatment they received from slaves. . . . We must have freemen."

"There speaks a true republican," said Cassius. "I shall recruit freemen for you in plenty. Most of them are unemployed because of the influx of slaves captured in our own wars."

Misanthrope or not, Cassius was proving himself to be a jewel. The red-hatted fellows he rounded up knew their trades, even though they were accustomed to only the most primitive types of tools.

We needed wire for "hukeneyes"? It could be laboriously hand drawn. Grease and lye for the manufacture of soft soap? The abbatoirs and charcoal pits that supplied meat and fuel for a city of several million population had them. Phosphorus for matches? Wasn't that the smoky stuff found in swamps and commonly known as fox fire?

Horn for buttons? Iron for plow shares? Wood for clothespins and harness hames? All such materials were plentiful, they told us. It was just that no one had ever thought of using them to make magic.

The freemen—and freewomen also, since we employed everyone who applied for a job—provided us

with an unexpected dividend. They lived in all parts of town and had hosts of gossipy friends; they made perfect spies. Hugh didn't yet dare use his bribed troops to attack either the Nubians or Antony's seasoned Legion so he was, as we had expected, devoting all his energies to the development of new weapons. Since, however, he had no scruples against slave labor, he not only was having production troubles, but was antagonizing the jealous Roman citizenry.

I appointed Cassius as our "expediter." He raised funds among the republicans and imperialists as well. He bought or requisitioned raw materials and smuggled them upriver or through Hugh's lines.

Larry became "production manager." He drew simplified sketches of our proposed gadgets and taught the staff to convert them into finished products.

Cicero was our publicist, a role he loved. Every day he arose in the Senate and delivered a stinging Philippic against Hugh and his pretentions. For the first time in his long career he received ovations from both parties. It was largely because of the row he raised that we were left to labor in peace.

I concentrated on preparing and distributing propaganda directly to the populace, with what help Lepidus could give me. We were supposed to have additional assistance from Antony but he was seldom

"free." He had begun to lose interest as soon as we decided not to make immediate war on Hugh and was falling completely under Cleopatra's spell.

Our spies told us that he was having stiff competition. Hugh also was a frequent visitor to the royal barge, even though his interviews with the queen often were stormy and had once ended with him being thrown overboard.

"Your false Octavian refuses to enter our presence backward." Cleopatra glittered at me when I paid her an official call to get the straight of this. "He calls us 'Babe,' which we gather is a term of rude endearment. Once he touched our august presence here . . ." She indicated the pretty spot. "And once he even tried to kiss us. That was when we had him thrown overboard in his armor. We thought to feed him to the crocodiles but he swam, laughing, to his boat."

"No crocodiles come up the Tiber, unfortunately," I grinned.

"And yet," she mused, resting a rounded chin on her hand, "he is so confident. And so strong and handsome. Stronger than Antony, we're told. We have the future of Egypt to think of. What if he should win? He also is a magician."

"Your Majesty," I said with a confidence I did not feel, "if Hugh wins he will eat you up. He will eat Rome up. You will be his slave. If we win, Antony

will be *your* slave. Also, there are other gifts from the future, and your resurrection, to consider. Think well on this. There is always time to change sides."

"We have thought," she said craftily, "that perhaps your magic is weakening. Our so beautiful stockings already are wearing out. They have developed holes that look like little ladders."

"A pity," I sighed, remembering Mary's tactic. "The factory smoke in this district is damaging to them. A great pity."

"Are there no others?" Tears came to her almond eyes.

"Oh yes. But they are reserved for our supporters among the great ladies of Rome."

"They must not have them!" Frantic, she sprang off her throne.

"You talk of joining our enemies."

"Oh never. Never!" She was actually pleading. "May I have them if—if I tell you a secret?"

"Perhaps." I knew I had her when she dropped into the first person singular.

"The false Octavian plans to prove his might by shattering the Temple of Concord."

"Great and loyal queen . . ." I bowed to the floor. "The stockings are yours."

I seldom saw Mary during those hectic days except when I called a meeting of our governing body

. . . I had insisted, against great opposition, in naming it the Plebeian Council . . . or when I consulted with her about the fabrication, by needlewomen among the vestal virgins, of several hundred silk bags. (I had conceived the idea that the best way to get through the iron curtain that Hugh had established north of our factories was to send over hot air balloons loaded with propaganda. Even though most Romans were illiterate I felt that the miraculous appearance of such messengers would attract enough attention to get across the news they carried.)

"I always underestimated you back at school," Mary told me on one of our brief encounters. "I think the work you're getting under way is positively marvelous."

"I love you too," I said with a silly grin as we stood in the center of the barracks where scores of handicraftsmen were beginning to get the knack of turning out our gadgets.

She brushed the tousled hair out of her tired eyes, pressed a hand to her forehead, and looked at me sharply under it.

"I've always loved you," I rushed on. "Now that Hugh . . . I mean, now that . . . Well, do you think maybe you could learn to care a little for a fat guy like me?"

"Have you looked at yourself lately?" she asked as she stood on tiptoe to kiss me. "We're all working too

hard. You'll soon be as skinny as Cassius and I'll have a permanent headache."

"You're feeling under the weather?"

"Oh, no. I'm all right. But the air is simply awful in this part of town."

"Even old Seneca couldn't take the Emporium," I chuckled. "Remember how he said that 'as soon as I had gotten out of the heavy air of Rome and from the stink of the smoky chimneys thereof, which being stirred poured forth whatever pestilent vapors and soot they held enclosed in them, I felt an alteration of my disposition.'"

"I'd manage all right, I think," she smiled wanly, "if only there was an aspirin in this world."

"Larry!" I yelled.

He came galloping out of his office.

"Do you have a headache too?"

"The old bean's bursting."

"Mary thinks you ought to drop everything and make some aspirin."

"Aspirin!" he whooped. "Why didn't I think of that? It's what every Roman needs. If Cato had had a few tablets handy to calm his nerves there need never have been any Punic wars."

"Can you make it *here*, Dr. Adams?"

"Let's see." He brushed at his cowlick and gave it up as a bad job. "I'd need phenol. Can get that at

the charcoal pits from the incomplete combustion of wood, or at the abattoirs from animal urine.

"React the phenol with lime to get sodium phenolate. Heat the phenolate and bubble carbon dioxide through it."

"Where will you find CO^2?"

"There are plenty of carbonated springs around, or we can stew Brutus over a slow fire. Now we will have salicyclic acid. React that with vinegar and you have acetylsalicyclic acid. Wash the resulting crystals and there you are: Aspirin!

"I'll talk to 'Abe' about this, of course. Also, I'll need some beakers, retorts and stuff."

"Ask Pontifex Maximus Lepidus for the glassware," Mary said. "His vestal virgins cook up a lot of stews to impress the laity."

"On the double!" Larry started away.

"Wait a minute," I said. "A little asp just told me Hugh plans to blow up the Temple of Concord. We'd better call a Council meeting and develop some counter demonstration."

"No," said Mary. "There are a few snakes in that outfit. They'd be sure to pass the word."

"You're right," said Larry. "Just leave the temple to me, along with the aspirin and a thousand or so other details."

He galloped toward his office, yelling to his superintendents to follow.

"Mary," I said, "that tip about the temple came from Cleo. Take the day off. Go out to the barge, touch her up a bit and present her with two more pairs of nylons."

"Yes, boss." She kissed me again and I went away walking on air.

CHAPTER XIII

If we had worked hard the first week, we sweated blood for the next three. We visitors had become accustomed to working overtime and on weekends at Hutter, but the Romans hadn't put in a day's labor since the times of Cincinnatus, and some of them found it hard to adjust.

Our first hurdle was that of teaching the principles of division of labor to handicraftsmen accustomed to turning out a complete set of harness, pair of shoes or whatnot. They found it hard to believe that work could be speeded up if one crew drew wire and another took over and bent it into shape, or if one gang

punched out button blanks from horn or shell while another concentrated on drilling the holes.

Yet, thanks to the indefatigable Larry and a sour-faced superintendent named Avram Avram that he found somewhere, we got our assembly lines rolling. Given time, we knew we could supply all of Rome's needs. But we had no time!

Spot materials shortages plagued us, too. The balloon barrage weakened for a time because silk, imported by camel caravan from the Far East, was a rare and precious article. Mary solved this one by inducing the vestals to donate their vestments. Since the poor darlings wore nothing underneath, this necessitated the closing of their temple to the public!

Sabotage was an ever-present threat. One of Hugh's bruisers was in the act of pouring vinegar into a cauldron of our grease-and-lye soap mixture when Avram caught him. The result? Bruiser was stripped and tossed into the vat. He scrambled out, a brilliant pink all over, and fled yelling, to the vast delight of our freemen. Afterward, we didn't have too much trouble from that source.

"We're running out of money," Cassius reported to a Council meeting at the end of the second week.

"How much do you need?" asked Antony, who was miraculously present. "I'll take my Legion and collect tribute at all the villas within a day's march of Rome."

"No," said Mary. "That would alienate the patricians. We must have as many of them as possible on our side. That means we must pay our way."

"How about a fund-raising banquet, like the political parties run back home during election campaigns?" I asked. "Let's say a one hundred-aurei-a-plate shindig?"

"Wonderful," cried Publia, who had accompanied her husband to the meeting. "Marcus Tullius and I have been thinking of holding some affair at our town house."

"We have?" Cicero's eyes popped.

"Yes, dear." She patted his hand. "To celebrate our reconciliation, you know."

"How much will it cost me?" the old miser demanded.

"Not an aurus," I assured him. "Expenses are a first charge on the take."

"Oh, fine." He swelled. "I'll make a speech, of course."

"Of course," I sighed. "Publia, you issue the invitations. Be sure every millionaire in town gets one. I'll run over to the office of the *Acta Diurna* and get them to run a big story. Perhaps I can get a follow-up story on the heliograph. We need publicity in every part of the empire."

"You shall be my Minister of Propaganda when I

take power," Octavian beamed. "Excellent thinking, my boy."

My boy! And I was at least five years his senior!

I felt better when Mary blew a kiss of appreciation to me but I wasn't prepared for the kick on the shins that Larry gave me as the meeting was breaking up.

"Letting Octavian steal your girl?" he inquired. "What are you, Ralph, a man or a mouse?"

"A hamster would be a more accurate description," I said. "And even if I aspired to be a mouse, what could I do? They're obviously nuts about each other. You saw how she fussed over him all during the meeting."

"I'm not so sure about that. Mary is too well balanced to go off her rocker. Talk to her."

I couldn't bring myself to do it. Instead I wandered about, inspecting our products. They were heartbreakingly meager—a few boxes of "huken-eyes," of mediocre soap, of hard candy, of ridiculous clothespins and other gadgets that I didn't bother to examine. A few farm tools for demonstration purposes only. With the best will in the world, our workers wouldn't be able to go into large-scale production on such items. . . . A few . . .

I turned away bitterly. It was inconceivable that such trinkets would impress the hardboiled mob—the Roman mob conditioned to war for centuries.

"Unless your propaganda has softened them up, Ralph."

I turned to find Mary watching me. There were dark circles under her eyes again but she was smiling that crooked smile that made me love her. I wanted to take her in my arms and comfort her. Instead I said: "Uh, Mary. Just forget what I said last week, will you?"

"You mean?" Her eyes filled with tears.

"I know how you and Octavian feel about each other," I blundered on. "We visceratonics know a lot of things like that without being told."

"You do?" All of a sudden she was angry for no reason I could discern. "Well, let me tell you, Ralph Graves, I have a job to do here, just as you do."

"I . . . I don't get you."

"Look," she snapped. "Professor Gordon said I was suggestible, didn't he?"

"Well, yes, I guess so."

"So it's possible he gave me a post-hypnotic suggestion to be nice to Octavian if I met him, isn't it?"

"It's possible, Mary, but . . ."

"Are you so stupid as to think I'd naturally prefer a tailor's dummy like that to you?"

"Yes," I said. "I am."

"You poor darling!" Suddenly she was on tiptoe

again and kissing my lips. "Octavian is the kingpin in this operation. If we lose him, we're ruined. I'm going to do whatever I can, no matter what, to keep him on our side. But remember this . . . you're the big goof I really love."

"Oh!" I felt as if a light had been turned on inside me. "Then listen, Mary. We've got to follow Lysh's lead. Otherwise, we'll leave Rome worse than we found it. So forget me and stick by Octavian. He's no tailor's dummy. Much as I hate to say it, he's a big man—too big for Hugh to defeat if he has proper direction. But he desperately needs somebody like you to guide him—to see he doesn't go chasing off after a crown and divinity as Augustus Caesar. And he needs seasoning before he comes to power.

"Keep him away from greedy, ambitious women. He's a pushover. And don't let him send Lepidus to Africa. You and Marcus Aemilius will always know how to make him toe the line and think only of Rome's good."

"Why, Ralph! You talk almost as if you knew what was going to happen."

"Forget it," I choked. "We've got to prepare for Publia's party."

For the fourth and last time Mary kissed me before she ran down a factory aisle so I wouldn't see the tears on her cheeks, or vice versa.

That party at Cicero's was something for the books. Hugh's mob picketed it, of course. "Traitors Beware" and "The Time of Reckoning Is at Hand" read some of his placards.

Litters of the more timorous patricians were scared away by this tactic. A large majority crossed the picket line of booing gangsters, especially after Cassius disrupted it by organizing a squad of cudgel-swinging freemen who chanted "No More Slaves," "Jobs and Dignity" and "Down with the Bloody Usurper."

Even so, the affair promised to be a frost. Most of the bejeweled and bejowled matrons present were partisans of Terentia, Cicero's first and fiercely middle-aged wife. They resented the fact that she had been supplanted by young Publia and took no pains to conceal their feelings. The best food and entertainment that Rome afforded could not change their opinions.

"Oh, Gaius Ralpius Gravius," Publia whispered to me when the going got really tough. "You saved one party for me. Can you do likewise now?"

"We need an extra added attraction," I said. "Did you invite Cleopatra and Antony?"

"Of course. But you know how *she* is. Romans are dirt under her feet. And Marcus Antonius is her lapdog."

"Have fast horses saddled," I commanded. "Mary and I will bring them."

I'll seldom forget that jolting ride to the Tiber. Why do horses have such unfriendly backbones?

We arrived at the royal barge at last to find Antony and Cleo in one of their famous clinches.

I stormed into the royal presence, face first, in a style which, I fondly imagined, was a good imitation of Octavian's.

"What means this, Marcus Antonius?" I thundered. "Sunk in sweet dalliance while Rome goes to the lapdogs."

"Oh, be off, Ralph," he said crossly. "The queen and I are discussing love."

"You should be discussing hate! The false Octavian swears that, within two weeks, he'll put the Queen of Egypt in his harem."

"He does?" Antony dropped his queen, leaped to his feet and started donning his armor.

"As for you," I snarled at Cleopatra before she could recover her poise, "the Roman matrons say you fear to appear at Publia's party because you have nothing to wear. Are you going to let them get away with that slander?"

"Mary!" The queen rose to my bait like Venus from the waves. "We have need of your magic!"

"Here it is," Mary said as she opened Professor

Gordon's package and shook out his final gift, the gold lamé gown. "It will make Your Majesty lovelier than the dawn."

What an entrance she made into Cicero's peristylum!

The dress, which bore the unmistakable imprint of the Rue de la Paix, was a devastatingly simple sheath that left one of her exquisite shoulders bare and clung to every other line of her body. It's only adornment was an elaborate brooch at the beltline, but this was picked up by jeweled bracelets that coiled, like serpents, from her wrists to her elbows, and by the lotus crown surmounting her auburn hair. The sheath was slit on one side from knee to ankle to display a nylon stocking and gold sandal.

A pin was heard to drop all the way to the foot of Capitoline Hill as Cleopatra, on Antony's arm, paced into the room like a leopard. Stola-draped women suddenly became aware of their ugly flounces and lumpy waistlines. Men stopped their chatter to gaze spellbound at the world's loveliest queen. Cicero dropped the tablets on which his speech was written. I crossed my fingers and prayed.

Cleopatra accepted the homage due her as she and the purring Antony circled the huge room. Then, as I had coached her, she lifted a hand for silence and said simply:

"These are gifts from the future which our friends have brought to make the women of Rome more beautiful than they have ever been." She glanced from face to admiring face with level, kohl-enhanced eyes and added: "*For those who are our friends* there are many more such baubles waiting."

After that the golden aurei began dropping. Even Cicero's speech failed to dam the flood of donations. Before that hectic evening was over, our financial worries were ended; and, at Publia's urging, the matrons had herded their men folk into our corner "for the duration."

Thereafter, until the Ides of April arrived, we all toiled as though the devil were driving to prepare our miracles for inspection at the Forum.

CHAPTER XIV

At our last Council meeting, held before sunrise on April 15, I got the members to agree that we should go to the Forum as unostentatiously as possible. We were, I reminded them, the Plebeian Council, an humble servant of the Roman people. There must be no fanfare and no dramatics. We would go on foot in pairs by separate streets. That not only would prove we were true republicans, like Cincinnatus; it would make it almost impossible for Hugh to stop us.

Lepidus and I puffed along together—the longest walk either of us had taken in years. As we left the

drab factory district and worked our way north we found the city in holiday mood. The weather was perfect, so everybody was out, dressed in his best.

Shutters of the shops and taburnae were closed and locked, however; this meant that their owners expected a riot before the day was out. The building walls, mostly of concrete covered with thin slabs of marble, screamed with placards proclaiming the war prowess of the alleged emperor. Many of these, I noted, already had been scribbled over with red chalk slogans calling for "Peace," "Jobs" and "Honest Votes," and with lewd jingles of which this is one of the cleaner examples:

The false Octavian talks a lot.
He says that peace is a Parthian plot.
We say to him that the Forum we'll picket.
Let him have his war. He knows where to stick it!

Yes, Rome . . . poor hungry, bored Rome . . . was honing for trouble.

As we fought for elbow room on the narrow sidewalks of the Sacred Way, we heard the tramp of marching men and the screaming of buccinae, the C-shaped war trumpets. Cheering or booing goodnaturedly, the mob flattened us against a temple wall as it made way for Hugh's Legion.

Eyes front, oblong leather shields swinging in unison, wicked five-foot-long pilae held in serried rows,

the troops went by like a living battering ram. After them marched about three-fourths of the 600 members of the Senate in flowing togas, red shoes and bright chaplets.

"Looks as though our propaganda was a flop," I said to Lepidus.

"Those Senators are mostly trash from the rotten boroughs," he answered. "The real leaders of Rome haven't joined in this false triumph."

Hugh passed us, wearing a purple mantle and chaplet of gilded laurel leaves. Standing in a chariot drawn by four white horses and driven by a slim Greek, he looked neither to right nor left.

"Io triumphe! Ave Caesar! Ave Octaviane!" screamed his supporters in the mob while the air grew heavy with the odor of incense burning in hundreds of altars. Matrons on the balconies—those who had refused to attend Publia's banquet—rained down masses of flowers and sprinkled saffron over the procession.

"If this were a proper triumph," Lepidus shouted in my ear, "the emperor or victorious general would have a slave standing beside him to whisper: 'Remember, you are but a mortal' every few seconds."

"That wouldn't bother Superman," I grinned wryly. "Come on. Let's get into the Forum while there's an inch of room left."

The horseshoe-shaped "square" already was

jammed. Nevertheless, by using our elbows, knees and shoulders to best advantage, we managed to reach and mount the Rostrum. As we had hoped, people stood shoulder-to-shoulder around this platform, leaving no room for troops. The Legionnaires had to turn aside and let Hugh's chariot proceed with only the Senators as its guard of honor.

The windows of surrounding buildings popped with spectators and the roofs were loaded as well. Only the Temple of Concord, which had been allowed to fall into semi-ruin during this time of discord, stood dark and empty behind a tight ring of vigiles.

Avram Avram, smiling for once, forced his way through the press at the head of a group of his workmen and stationed himself just below the Rostrum. Our staff members were avid as school children to see the miracles they had created go into operation.

Antony, in his shiniest armor, was lounging with Cleopatra behind a balustrade which gave a good view of the proceedings. He lifted an arm in lazy greeting to Lepidus, then continued whispering sweet nothings into the queen's rosy ear.

"There, if the gods be kind today," I said to our patron, "lolls not the brutal Triumvir and murderer of Cicero but the henpecked prince consort of the Serpent of the Nile."

"It will be just as well to have him on the other side of the Mediterranean," Lepidus agreed.

Mary and Larry appeared, shepherding our precious gifts to the past.

"What did you ever do about the Temple of Concord problem?" I asked our production manager when the things were arranged to his liking.

"Sorry. I can't tell you." Larry's face was gloomy. "I did the only thing I could think of to put Hugh in a hole but I'm beginning to think I made a bad mistake. If my plan backfires you can boot me back to the twentieth century, I guess."

Publia, Cicero and Brutus fought their way up the Rostrum steps. I looked in vain for Octavian and Cassius. Apparently they were still caught in traffic.

Then we waited for Hugh, who was making a tremendous fuss about dismounting from his chariot and greeting the senators and other patricians who fawned about him. That gave me a chance to study the mob. There was a vast difference from that which had attended Caesar's funeral, but what was it? The answer hit me all of a heap. Half the people present were women, many of whom had brought children, even their babes in arms. Well! Mary's hard work was bearing fruit.

I felt a little better until I caught sight of the real Octavian stalking through the throng and acknowl-

edging greetings from all quarters. Although he had promised not to do so, he was wearing a snow-white candidatus.

"More trouble," I said to Larry.

"In spades," he agreed. "Our boy wants to be emperor. We've got to block him, even if he murders us afterward."

"Speaking of murder!" Lepidus yelled. "Quick. Help me!"

As he lunged forward, I saw that a group of hoodlums was converging on Octavian. Knives out, lips snarling with bloodlust, the assassins were within yards of their smiling quarry.

Antony saw the danger, too, and was over the balustrade like a tiger, short sword in hand. Drawing daggers from under our tunics, Larry and I followed him and Lepidus.

We had twenty yards to go and it soon became plain that we would arrive too late. The mob was as dense as glue by this time. Once, while clambering over a stone bench, I saw Octavian laying about him gamely with his dagger. He was holding off his attackers for the moment but their ring was slowly tightening.

"Vigiles, ho!" I yelled.

The policemen in Hugh's pay stood like statues. Oh, he had planned this carefully!

Then I heard a high-pitched Semitic yell. The

crowd boiled and through it Avram Avram came smashing at the head of a flying wedge of our workmen.

The would-be assassins turned to flee those curved knives, chisels and flailing cudgels. Onlookers locked arms and prevented their escape. To a man, they were cut down or beaten into the pavement while the bloodthirsty Romans roared their delight at the spectacle. Octavian was lifted to the shoulders of two sweating rescuers and, his toga in tatters, deposited on the Rostrum.

Hugh made the best of a bad bargain. Hurriedly mounting the platform, he embraced his rival and gave cynical thanks to the gods for his safety. Then, as the buccinae blared once more, he stepped forward, like a man made of wood, and gave the citizenry a straight arm salute.

As the uproar died while the people responded automatically to the ancient greeting, Hugh lifted a megaphone to his lips and began to speak in a voice of thunder.

I won't quote him verbatim. It was the same old hokum about the past, present and future glories of Rome; about the coming victory over Parthia and the hordes of slaves that would be taken in the East; about Rome's destiny to rule the world; about the cowards, whose names he would not sully his tongue to mention, who talked cravenly of peace.

And the keyed-up mob ate it up . . . or I thought they did at first. They yelled at appropriate moments until the very cobblestones rattled.

"He has them in his pocket," I said to Mary.

"Don't be silly," she answered. "Take another look."

This time I saw that young men were doing most of the shouting. The women, and tight knots of older workers and displaced farmers, were keeping their peace and frowning.

"The traitors have promised you miracles today," Hugh wound up his bombast at last. "They tell you their magic will make life easier. But I tell you that only the victorious advance of our Legions can make life easier. Only in battle can we take slaves and the gold to fill the coffers of almighty Rome."

"Slaves to take away the honest jobs of Roman citizens," some leather-lunged spectator bellowed.

I looked at Lepidus and saw him grinning all over his round face. A plant in the audience! Something I had forgotten to attend to in the last-minute rush. My patron was learning fast.

Hugh reddened. Perhaps he remembered what he had done to Antony at the funeral. But he was smart.

"Who wants to toil when he can live like a king on the toil of others?" he jeered. "I tell you that, if you follow me, no Roman citizen need lift a hand for the rest of his life. And . . ." he took a page out of Nero's

book—"there will be daily circuses with wild beasts and gladiators in the Colosseum I plan to build. And baked bread, instead of wheat, will be distributed free at every street corner daily."

"Bread from the provinces," yelled the unseen heckler. (The lictors and vigiles were looking for him but the mob, beginning to chuckle now, was blocking their progress.) "Bread which has pauperized Italy's hardy farmers. Bread which has driven them to Rome to exist on your miserly dole."

"Bread! Bread!" Others took up the shout. "Bloody bread!"

Hugh affected to be hurt. He held up his hand until a sort of quiet was restored.

"You do not believe me," he said sadly. "You think I am like Sulla and Pompey, who promised you victories and gave you defeats. Look then, at *my* miracle. It is the weapon which makes the Legions invincible. With it, they can conquer the world, yes, even the yellow peoples of far Sericane, so that you all may feast and own slaves. I warn you: only when Rome rules the entire world can you have peace. Now watch!"

"Not yet!" whooped the heckler. "Let Octavian and Lepidus first tell us what they have to offer."

Hugh hesitated and was lost as shouts of "Io Lepidus! Io Octaviane" shook the Forum walls.

Hugh bowed his head before this demonstration

and the battered Octavian stepped to the edge of the Rostrum.

He spoke well, but he was not a trained orator and the speech, which he had insisted on preparing himself, fell a bit flat. He promised the end of graft, reform of the government and a firm defense of Rome's borders. He pledged that, if he were chosen emp—no, he amended when I dug him frantically in the ribs—if he were elected president of the Roman Republic, he would devote the rest of his life to the improvement of its fortunes.

When he finished the crowd applauded politely. They liked the big young fellow; they knew he was a good general, an honest man and Caesar's chosen successor. Still, I saw many of them look at their neighbors doubtfully. They wanted a better showman than this to lead them.

Lepidus came forward now, to face a mingled barrage of cheers from our supporters and catcalls from Hugh's. He didn't look like much, what with his potbelly and florid jowls, but he could speak like an angel. And what a speech he had to deliver. Larry, Cicero and I had toiled over it for days and polished it like a jewel. It was couched in the simplest language and embellished with plenty of those four-letter words which Romans loved. Lepidus told the mob what he was going to tell them. Then he *told* them, in language cribbed from Shakespeare, Plutarch and

being thrown out of Paradise. "Like Cicero, I've been an ass."

"Guess I'm lucky too. Octavian had a mean look in his eye."

"Where or when are we now?" He put both hands to his head. "Oh, glory! I wish I had one of Larry's pills."

"We ought to be back about where we started from."

"That's impossible." He jumped up, so wild-eyed that the child retreated a pace. "The atom bombs fell, don't you remember?"

"Apparently they didn't, on this time track. We made a few changes in Rome, don't *you* remember?"

"Oh!" He took his time getting this through his skull. "But, in that case, the world's all different. We'll be strangers."

"Suppose so." I scratched my head. "And yet the city—what I see of it from here—looks about the same as it used to."

"Could it be possible that things haven't changed?" Hope dawned in those miserable eyes.

"Let's go see."

Well, the buildings seemed in better repair than I remembered. They didn't lean against one another every which way. The people we passed, especially the children, looked cleaner and healthier than they should have, although they all would have been

arrested for indecent exposure in the modern Rome I had visited so briefly. Maybe though, that impression was due to my more recent contact with the indescribable filth and bulky clothing of the ancient city.

Yet the smiling pushcart peddlers, the orange peels in the gutters and the distant sound of accordion music were familiar. The public buildings and the Colosseum looked as they should have, though the latter had been "restored." The only things really out of place were Hugh's purple toga and my tunic. These occasioned giggles and finger-pointings by the pretty girls we passed.

"There's our hotel," said Hugh. "It's had a coat of paint."

"Let's ask if Lysh is registered."

"You're crazy." He followed me into the lobby. On the register, surely enough, we found Professor Gordon's neat signature.

We went up. Gordon answered our ring, wearing that old smoking jacket of his and, mirabile dictu!, a pair of shorts. He had bought a toupee and dyed his hair since last we had seen him. I couldn't help wondering what Piggy would say about that. Otherwise, he seemed unchanged.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen." He saw at once that we were Americans, despite our garb. "What can I do for you?"

"You *are* Professor Elisha Gordon of Hutter College?" I asked.

"Hutler University," he corrected. "Yes, I am. Come in."

"You don't remember us?" I went on when we were seated.

"Can't say I do, at least in those masquerade costumes. Former students of mine, perhaps? I have a rather poor memory for faces and somatypes. They often are greatly changed by time, experience and environment."

I looked at myself in a mirror. I did seem older. Fitter, too, and more mature. I tried again: "Is this the year 1965 A.D.?"

"Is this some sort of joke?" He filled his pipe, lit it, and studied us over the smoke. "This is 2009 A.C. —after Caesar."

"We're dead serious," Hugh cut in, "but we're lost. Tell us this: Is Mary Peale one of your students?"

"Yes. Yes indeed." Some of Gordon's uncertainty evaporated. "A brilliant child. I'm expecting her and a classmate to drop in shortly. I'm conducting a seminar trip, you see, and they've been out shopping. Won't you wait?"

"We certainly will," I said, my heart plunging.

"Do you know Larry Adams?" Hugh persisted.

"Of course. He's the classmate I spoke of."

"How about Ralph Graves?" I asked with a shiver.

"No-o-o. I do have a *Samuel* Graves as one of my postgraduates. Unfortunately he is engaged in some research at Hutler and couldn't come to Europe with us."

Sam! Good old Sam! I felt like dancing.

"Do you know a Hugh Woltman?" The big fellow was biting his lips.

"No. Sorry. Never heard of him."

"And how is your wife?" I asked to relieve the strain.

"My wife? She died last year, dear soul." Gordon blinked and recovered himself. "Oh, excuse me. You both look tired and thirsty. Will you have a beer?"

"With pleasure," I said, a deep longing for those almost forgotten suds sweeping over me.

As the sun sank behind the Colosseum we told him our story, disjointedly to begin with, then in a wild rush.

At first the professor listened with a smile, sure that we were pulling his leg. Later he grew intent: Consulted texts. Stabbed that forefinger at us. Barked questions. Raised objections which we overrode.

Mary and Larry—or their doubles, if you prefer—drifted in after a bit. I had to kick Hugh's ankle to keep him from going over and taking his old place on the floor at the girl's feet. They didn't recognize us, of course; how could they? Their ancestors had come normally through the generations. We had

balled everything up by ducking back and forth across a time fissure.

By the time we had filled them in and finished our tale, darkness had fallen and we all were at the bottoms of our third beer bottles. (That was one difference I noted in *this* Mary. She *liked* beer.) Then Gordon started to lecture, stamping up and down the carpet as of yore.

"Either you gentlemen are trying to perpetrate the world's greatest hoax . . . which I can't believe . . . or you're telling the truth . . . which I can't believe," he began. "Yes, I'm familiar with Bartlett's time track theories, although I always considered them a bit, shall I say, infantile, and have built no time machines nor other gadgets to test them.

"Scientists of this era think of time-travel speculation as mental gymnastics in the study of paradoxes. You, on the other hand, insist that those theories are capable of proof. Hmmm! I must think this through."

He paced some more until Hugh asked, "Professor, is your world in no danger of an atomic war?"

"An atomic war!" He glared at us, round-eyed. "Of course not. Any war is utterly ridiculous today. We use atomic fusion for power, not as a weapon. Wars are something we read about in the ancient history books . . . and find hard to understand. Our world government has been functioning for more than a millennium."

"Has a balance been achieved among the viscera-tonic, somatotonic and cerebrotonic elements in human nature?" I wanted to know.

"Naturally. Naturally. That came about during the period you say you visited, during the Presidency of Lepidus and, after his death, of Octavian."

"Can you tell me the name of Octavian's wife?" I barely whispered.

"It was the same as mine," Mary spoke up. "A very unusual name for a Roman woman. Most of them had numbers, didn't they?"

"Yes, Roman girls usually were called 'Prima,' 'Quinta' or 'Octavia' to show they were the first, fifth or eighth child in a family, and so on," I agreed, glad that I had aroused her interest.

"But this I can't understand, professor." I came back to the main puzzle. "If we made any major change in the time track back there, the course of history should have been entirely different, according to Bartlett. Conditions should be alien to us. Yet things seem much the same in many ways. How come?"

"Because Bartlett was wrong, as I have always suspected," he answered. "Miss Peale!" Those piercing owl eyes which now needed no spectacles swivelled in her direction. "You are minoring in ecology. Tell us, please, what happens if a river bed becomes obstructed—by a landslide, let us say."

"Why the river cuts its way through the obstruction, or makes a detour by the easiest way, and usually returns to its old channel."

"The chances of its cutting an entirely new bed are negligible?"

"Except under the most unusual circumstances. As Swinburne has said:

"'Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.'"

"Well put, Miss Peale. That is the analogy Bartlett forgot when he compared time to a river. He thought that every crisis gave the choice of two completely divergent channels. That is arrant nonsense. There could be a temporary change of course only."

"Hold on," Larry objected. "The channel is beyond my depth."

"Put it this way," said Gordon. "I suspect that, if we asked them, these gentlemen would give us an entirely different version of history than the one we know. Probably they would say that Octavian, Antony and Lepidus formed their ill-fated Triumvirate; that there was a brutally somatotonic Roman Empire for a while, followed by the world's relapse into barbarism; that there were wars and rumors of wars for centuries, followed, I gather, by complete destruction in an atomic 'landslide.'

"*We* detoured all that horror and bloodshed. Un-

der Lepidus, Octavian, and their successors Rome staged a peaceful industrial revolution based on the inventions of that master engineer and scientist, Laurentius Adamacus—Laurentius Adamacus!" He looked at Larry and roared with sudden laughter.

"What's the matter?" the other demanded.

"My boy, you have led a double life," Gordon chortled. "Shame on you!" He turned back to Hugh and me.

"I know what you are thinking. You're thinking that, without wars, pestilences and famines, our world should have a gadgetry far superior to that of the one you grew up in. We should be bouncing around like fleas in ten-thousand-miles-an-hour rockets when we're not huddling in skyscrapers five hundred stories high. Also, you suppose that, with nothing to kill them off, humans now should be as tightly packed as fish in a barrel.

"But don't forget that we developed labor-saving machinery two thousand years ago. We should have learned to take it or leave it by now. Also, we developed a ridiculously simple way to control population growth—a graduated tax on children!"

"That makes no sense," I protested.

"Oh yes it does. We give an income tax deduction on each of the first three children born into a family. A fourth child means the loss of one deduction, and so on. If anyone is so foolish as to have a seventh

child the process goes into reverse and he pays through the nose for the privilege."

"Holy Moses!" was all I could think of to say.

"After our ancestors built enough machines to make life pleasant and abundant, they relaxed," Gordon went on. "Since then, we've spent most of our time enjoying ourselves and developing the all-important social sciences. The so-called exact sciences like physics and chemistry have had to take second place."

"Then you must have degenerated," Hugh burst out. "Without wars and tooth-and-nail competition, you've become a bunch of softies." His eyes began to take on that old feral gleam as he contemplated the possibilities."

"Don't be too sure of that," Gordon warned. "Yes, we almost make a cult of Visceratonia. We jog along pleasantly instead of whooping and hollering. But plenty of challenges remain to keep us on our toes—the conquest of an essentially hostile environment, for example. The end result is that our gadgetry is probably just about on a par with yours. On the other hand, our grasp of life's realities is much further advanced."

"But you resemble the Gordon we knew," Hugh said with returning uncertainty. "And Mary—Miss Peale—and Larry Adams seem identical with our friends of the same names. Confound it!" He beat his

fist on the table and spilled the last of his beer in the process. "None of you should be here at all!"

"Why?" The professor regarded him quizzically.

"Because . . ." Hugh grew silent.

"Perhaps you are the ones who shouldn't be here," Mary said softly.

"That's the point I've been trying to make," I said. "Why did we come *here?* Why didn't we return to our own world?"

"Because you haven't any world," said Larry.

"That doesn't answer my question," I yelled at him to hide my fright. "Why did we come *here?*"

"They must be having some sort of time crisis too?" Hugh hazarded.

"Oh! That!" Gordon paced back and forth, back and forth until I almost went mad. "Yes. Yes indeed. That explains matters. In fact, that's why we are returning to America tomorrow."

"What in Jupiter's name are you talking about, sir?" I pleaded.

"Haven't you heard the newscasts?" He stared at me in surprise. "Oh. I forget. Of course you haven't. Our first interstellar ship has returned from Alpha Centaurus. It landed at the New York spaceport an hour ago . . . at just about the time you found yourselves sitting in that gutter."

"Interstellar!" Hugh choked. "And we were still trying to make a landing on the Moon in '64."

"Hutler scientists played a big role in designing that ship," Gordon went on casually. "Its safe return undoubtedly makes the beginning of a new era for mankind. Miss Peale, Larry and I have been called home to help in evaluating the data it has brought."

There didn't seem much more to say after that. Professor Gordon invited Hugh and me to return with him. He hinted we might obtain some lucrative lecture engagements. Then he shooed us all out of the room so he could pack and write notes on our conversation.

Hugh eased over toward Mary as we left the hotel. But I had his number now . . . and mine too.

"Here," I said as I handed him some strange-looking bills that Gordon had slipped into my hand. "Go rustle up a place for us to spend the night, some decent clothes, and our return tickets. I'm sure Mr. Adams will show you the ropes."

"But I . . ."

"Run along," I commanded in my best Plebeian Council style. "I have important business to discuss with Miss Peale.

"Let's go somewhere and have a bite to eat," I continued as I took Mary's arm and marched her away. "I want to tell you more about your ancestor, Mrs. Octavian."