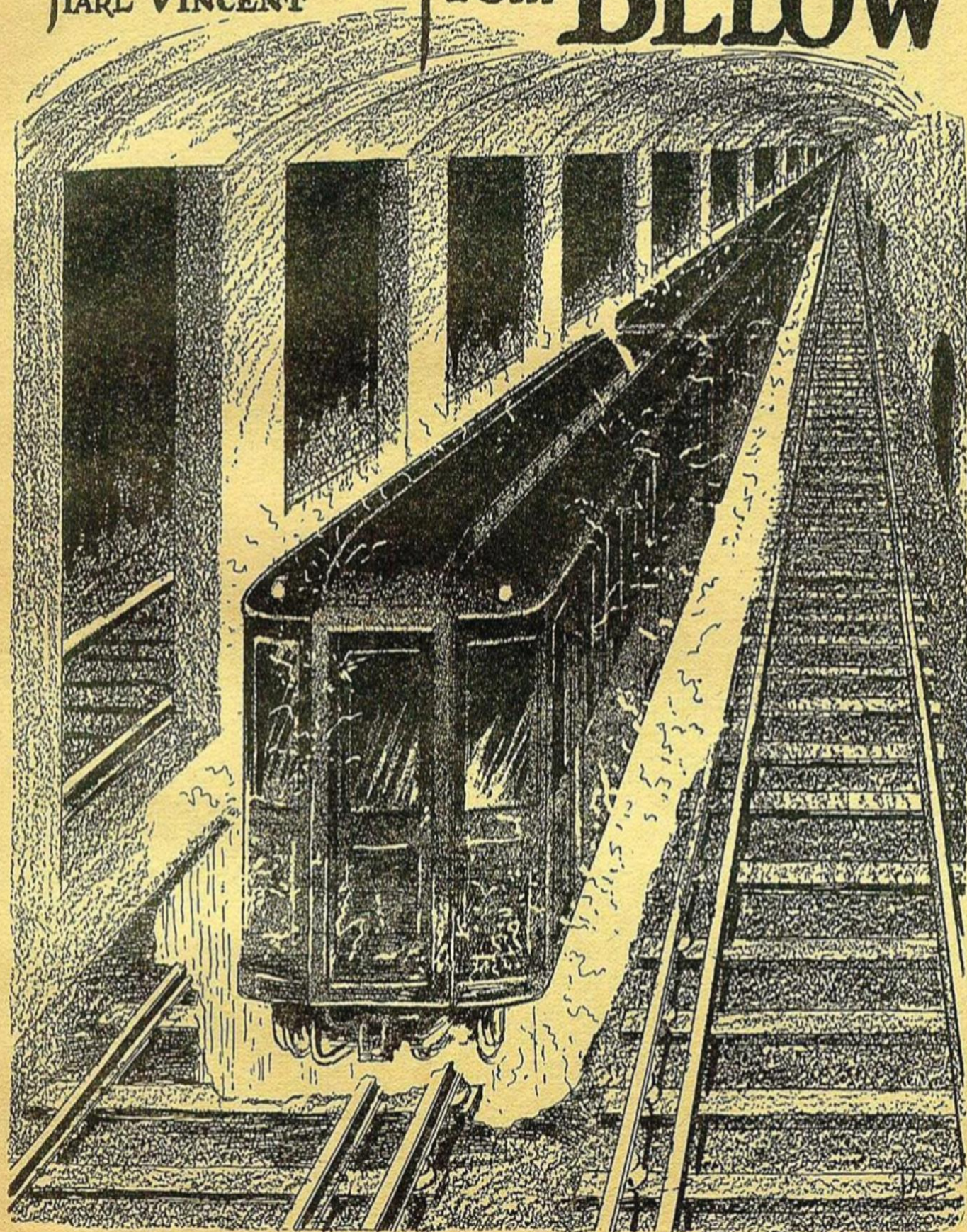


The Menace

by
HARL VINCENT

from **BELOW**



The Menace From Below

Written by
Harl Vincent

SCience Wonder Stories Vol 1, N° 2 (1929)

Publication Office, 404 North Wesley Avenue, Mt. Morris, Illinois.

Editorial and General Offices, 96-98 Park Place, New York City.

Stellar Publishing Corporation

H. GERNSBACK, Pres. I. S. MANHEIMER, Sec'y. S. GERNSBACK, Treas.

Transcription: Yan Viana

Published in: www.atomicvintage.com.br

Email: atomicvintage10@gmail.com

CHAPTER I - A Strange Disappearance

“WELL I’ll be dog-goned!” exclaimed Ward Platt as he unfolded his morning paper and read the screaming headlines that topped the first page.

He stared across the breakfast table at his wife, who was pouring his coffee. “Have you seen this, Mary ?” he asked.

“No, dear,” she replied, “I haven’t looked at the paper. What is it?”

“Just listen to this,” he said. “Either it is the greatest hoax ever attempted or it is the most mysterious happening that has ever been reported.”

The headlines and the sensational news item that so astonished Ward Platt on that memorable morning in the Spring of 1935 startled the entire civilized world and were forerunners of a series of amazing events in which Platt later became deeply involved. His wife listened in open-mouthed astonishment as he read the unbelievable news:

WEST SIDE SUBWAY EXPRESS TRAIN VANISHES
TEN CAR TRAIN LOST IN EAST RIVER TUNNEL
MORE THAN 500 PASSENGERS WERE ON BOARD

“At 12:35 A. M., it is reported, an Interborough express train, bound for Van Cortlandt Park, left Clark Street station, Brooklyn, and has not been seen since. The train did not appear at Chambers Street when due and, when the train scheduled to follow it pulled into that station, an investigation was started by officials of the Transit Company. Late riders, who waited in Wall Street station of the west side line for an unduly long period, report that the train did not pass through, so it is clearly evident that the missing train disappeared in the tube which passes under the East River between Clark and Wall Street stations. All cars and trains have been checked in and out of the various terminals and despatching stations, but the ten cars that comprised the strangely missing train can not be located.

“Just before going to press, this newspaper learned that a complete survey of the tunnel has been made and that there is no trace of the vanished train, nor are there any indications of the possible manner in which it disappeared. The tracks are intact throughout the length of the tunnel, as are the walls of the tube. It is estimated by officials of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company that no less than five hundred riders occupied

the train and this is considered to be a very conservative estimate. The police are completely mystified.” At this point Ward Platt looked up from his reading and gazed disbelievingly into the puzzled eyes of his wife. “Why, Mary,” he ejaculated, “this is ridiculous. The thing isn’t possible. How on earth can we be expected to believe such a yarn? How could a train of ten heavy cars, composed mainly of iron and steel, make its way through a solidly joined and concrete-lined tube of heavy cast iron that is buried deep in the mud and rock bottom of the river? The tube is of the same size throughout — there are but two lines of track, no sidings nor spurs— not a recess in which a man could hide, let-alone so massive a thing as a complete train of cars loaded with passengers. It must be a hoax.”

“It is scarcely credible,” said his wife, “little as I know about such things, it does not seem reasonable to me. But the Times is a very conservative paper and it hardly seems likely they would publish such a story unless it had a pretty strong foundation of fact.”

The newspaper article continued with a rambling, reportorial fantasy propounding highly imaginative and impossible solutions of the unprecedented happening. Suddenly Mary Platt thought of the radio and she snapped the switch. The agitated voice of a news announcer filled the room immediately.

“More than two hundred persons have telephoned the police and reported loved ones missing,” spoke the voice of the announcer. “The offices of the Transit Company are besieged by other hundreds who are looking for news of relatives and friends who were known to have been returning from Brooklyn to their homes in Manhattan or the Bronx at about the hour at which the train is said to have disappeared. The subway stations are packed with curious people and consternation is evident among those riders who find it necessary to board trains that must traverse the tunnel. Many are refusing to make the trip and are crowding the bridges, some using the surface cars but thousands crossing on foot. The police are finding considerable difficulty in limiting the bridge traffic to a safe volume.

“Each train that enters the tube is manned by twenty police officers, two to a car. The passengers are few and these are mostly people who consider the entire thing as a joke. But it is now clear that it is no joke but a terrible reality. Every effort of the Interborough detectives has failed of locating the missing train, whose car numbers are on record and definitely known to be missing. A number of persons who have been questioned by the police report waits at various points along the west side subway line to keep appointments with friends or relatives who must have taken a train at about the time

scheduled for the missing one. All evidence points to the truth of the report and it appears that New York City must face a disaster that is of considerable magnitude and is, so far, absolutely unexplainable.”

“Experts are now engaged in a minute examination of the tracks and of the tunnel itself to determine whether there are any traces whatsoever of the missing train and its occupants. No logical solution of the mystery has been advanced, though superstitious folk are hinting of ghostly visitations and all sorts of necromancy and witchcraft.”

“It seems that there is something in it,” said Mary Platt with a worried look at her husband, “are you going down town?”

“Indeed I am,” he responded, “I’ll be called in on this thing, you know.”

“You’re not going to take the subway, are you?” This in an extremely anxious voice from the pretty woman who faced the great engineer across the table of the cozy, breakfast nook in their Riverside Drive apartment.

“Of course I am, dear,” laughed her husband, “but only as far as Times Square. I’m going directly to the office.”

“Please don’t cross to Brooklyn,” entreated his wife, “at least until more has been learned of this terrible thing.”

“Don’t worry now, dear,” he said, arising from the table and preparing to leave, “I may have to get into the affair in detail but I shall take every precaution.”

But it was an extremely anxious little woman who waved to him a few minutes later as he swung down the Drive toward Seventy-second Street where she knew he would board a down-town express.

A Job For Magicians

WARD PLATT did some heavy thinking as he neared the kiosk at Seventy-second and Broadway. The firm of Platt and Frazee, of which he was senior partner, had won an enviable reputation as the greatest organization of Consulting Engineers in the country and Ward Platt himself was considered as the most able man in his line. The firm had prospered greatly and its widespread activities increased steadily in scope and magnitude, whether times were good or bad. Of late years their services had been in constant demand, not only by private corporations but by several states and municipalities. In New York they were compelled to establish a special department to handle municipal work, of which a considerable amount was obtained from the Department of Public Works. The services of the concern were likewise in great demand by the Transit Commission and it was for

this reason that Platt felt certain he would be called in on this weird problem which had so suddenly confronted the great metropolitan district.

He elbowed his way through a milling, gesticulating crowd at the subway entrance and made his way through the turnstile and down the stairs to the platform with some little difficulty. The crowd was oddly divided in opinion as to the strange happening of the night before. Some were frankly incredulous; others manifested their belief in almost anything that might have happened; all were more or less fearful of riding the trains. He found no trouble in obtaining a seat when he finally boarded a train, though he would ordinarily have been compelled to stand on a crowded platform since it was time of the regular morning rush.

When he reached his offices in the new Fortysecond Street Building he found his force gathered in excited groups with a great proportion of their number not yet arrived. His partner, Charles Frazee, hustled him into a conference room where sat Mayor Hamlin and two members of the Transit Commission.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said Ward Platt, removing his hat and top-coat, “I presume you are here so early on account of the reported loss of a subway train.”

“Yes, Ward,” said the mayor, “and something’s got to be done about it.”

Ward laughed. “That’s a pretty big order,” he said, “if there’s anything in these reports.”

“They’re absolutely true,” stated the mayor, “three persons have informed the police that they accompanied friends to the very train and watched it pull out of Clark Street station. The friends have never been heard from since, nor have any of more than three hundred other possible passengers on whom information has been obtained.”

“Well, it is certainly a most mysterious occurrence,” said Ward, “but what can you want us to do ?”

“I know it is a little out of your line — more like scientific detective work,” said the mayor, “but I don’t know anyone more capable of getting to the bottom of the matter than you and Charlie. It is a cinch that this trainload of people did not evaporate, but it is just as certain that it has disappeared as utterly as if dissolved into the air by some trick of the black art. But we all know that there is a logical explanation and that it can be found if proper effort is made. We want you to undertake the task.”

Ward Platt looked at his partner. “Well, what do you think of it, Charlie?” he asked.

“I haven’t the least idea what to look for,” replied young Frazee, “but we can try it.”

“All right,” said Ward, “we’ll try.”

The mayor grasped his hand. “Thanks, Ward,” he said, “I feel better already with you on the job. There’s the devil to pay about this, you know, and it’s going to be worse when the casualty lists are complete. The Police Commissioner will be instructed to furnish all assistance you may require from his men, and the City Engineers will supply anything in the way of material you may need.”

“It seems to me,” said Charles Frazee, “that we should have an Arthur Conan Doyle or a Houdini on this job rather than engineers and scientists and policemen. But we’ll tackle it.”

When the mayor’s party had gone, Ward faced his partner with a serious expression on his usually cheerful face. “Charlie,” he said solemnly, “this is the toughest job we ever tackled. And I can’t for the life of me see how we are going to get anywhere. A careful inspection has been made of the tunnel without results and we are not magicians, you know.”

“It’s a tough one, all right,” agreed the younger man, “but darn it all, Ward, it’s got to be solvable. That train was taken from the tracks and spirited away under the river by some outside agency and it must have been by physical means.”

“But who in the world would want to do such a thing, even if it were feasible?” queried the senior partner, “granting that it was done by some as yet unexplained human agency, what could be the possible motive?”

“It’s beyond me. Ward, but it was done somehow and it’s up to us to learn how. Have you anything in mind?”

“Nothing definite. But I think we should first make a trip through the tube and see if we can get any ideas. That is the first step, to my way of thinking, and we don’t want any police officers or detectives along either.”

“Right,” agreed Charlie, “let’s go.”

CHAPTER II – More Happenings

AT another point, not far from New York, the preceding night had brought strange happenings. At three in the morning, Anthony Russell lay awake in his bed, listening to the dreary patter of the rain on the tin porch roof outside his open window. He had retired early but he could not sleep, so, after courting slumber for a number of hours without success, he arose and, donning bathrobe and slippers, lighted a cigarette. He was restless and soon tossed aside the book he had started to read.

Tony as he was called by his intimate friends, had been working too hard for many weeks and it was beginning to tell on him. His sleeplessness this night was nothing new. For the past week or more he had scarcely slept a night through and finally, in desperation, he took the advice of his dear friend, Doctor Vance, and fled to the country for a week of rest.

So here he was, in a gloomy old house on the outskirts of Cartersville, two hours by subway and fast train from his office in Wall Street. And now, the very first night, his insomnia reasserted itself. Impatiently he stepped to the window and observed that the rain was becoming a mere misty drizzle. He decided to dress and venture outside. Anything was better than sitting until daylight in this high-ceilinged, old-fashioned room, with its flowered wall paper and sedate air of the "spare bed-room."

With hat pulled down to his ears and with rubber coat over his arm, he tip-toed down the stairs to the front door. Quietly, so as not to awaken the household, he drew the bolts and stepped out into the dank night air. The rain had now ceased entirely, but he shivered with the chill of the mist which hung low over the lawn, almost obscuring from view the lone street lamp on the corner.

He was unfamiliar with his surroundings, but proceeded up the street in a leisurely manner as he drew on his coat and buttoned the collar tightly about his neck. A block away, he remembered from observations made on his arrival the preceding evening, this street crossed a broad, concreted highway which was evidently quite new. He soon reached this and, turning to the right at the corner, started for the open country without thought as to how long he might prolong this nocturnal walk.

His mind was ever on his growing business in the city and, even now, he was thinking over the reorganization plans he had left uncompleted when good old "Doc" Vance hustled him out to Cartersville.

"Like most of you modern business men," the doctor had said, "you are killing yourself in your mad rush to make money. You must let up, Tony, or you will have a complete breakdown. And a fine thing that would be at your age. Why man, you're only thirty-two, and the best years of your life are still before you. Let your partner take care of things for a while and go up to the old Vance place in Connecticut for a rest. The old folks will take good care of you and I will come up myself for a week-end while you are there. It will do you worlds of good and we can have a pleasant two-day visit besides."

Tony argued and procrastinated but finally, with very poor grace, gave in to his friend's urgings.

But he found it difficult even now to rid his mind of business problems. It was not until he heard the sound of a rapidly approaching automobile that his thoughts turned into other channels. The road ahead was suddenly illuminated by the bright headlights of a speeding car and he stepped to the side of the road. As he looked back he was momentarily blinded by the intense glare and he nearly tumbled into the ditch as a powerful roadster shot past with a roar that spoke of speed limits broken, twice over.

“Whew!” he exclaimed, as he scrambled back to the slippery concrete, “that fellow’s in a hurry. Wonder where he’s rushing to at this hour of the morning.”

The mist had been almost dispersed by a freshly sprung-up breeze and he watched the beam of light that marked the car as it disappeared rapidly in the distance.

About two miles further on he stumbled into the spare tire carrier of an automobile parked at the side of the road. The head and tail lights had been extinguished, but he noted by the dim radiance of a small parking light that the car was a roadster of foreign make and of rakish lines that suggested power and speed.

“Must be the car that passed me,” he muttered. And when he touched the radiator and found it very hot he felt certain that this was the case.

While he pondered over the probable reasons for such a late and hurried visit to an apparently deserted spot, he became aware of voices a little distance off the road. They were raised in anger and his curiosity was at once aroused. But the darkness was intense and he could make out nothing in the direction from which they came.

“I tell you Bob, this is the end!” spoke one of the voices, shouting in anger.

With that, a square of light appeared about fifty feet from the road. This revealed itself as the lighted window of a second-story room. Tony watched for a moment and saw the two occupants of the room, one a tall man fully dressed, the other a short, heavy-set man in pyjamas who had evidently just been awakened by his late caller. The portly one walked to the window and closed it, with the obvious intention of shutting the sound of their voices from the outside world. He seemed to be highly agitated and shook his fist in his caller’s face before drawing the shade.

A light showed in the adjoining window and the same stout figure approached this. One. His caller had not followed, as far as Tony could see, but the man in pyjamas reached up to close this window as he had the first. With arms above his head, he seemed to gasp for air and then double up as if in pain. His hands came down without having touched the window and clutched wildly at his breast. His broad figure wilted and collapsed without a sound.

Tony hesitated, not knowing what to do, and in that instant the heavily-coated stranger stepped into the field of vision and bent over the body which had now slumped out of view below the window sill. For a moment the tall man remained in this position, then he stood erect and completed the task started by the other. He closed the window and hastily drew the shade.

Vanished!

FEELING certain that something out of the ordinary, probably a tragedy, had occurred, Tony felt his way along the hedge that enclosed the grounds until he found an opening, through which he made his way and reached a gravel walk. There was not a sound from the house, which he could barely make out as a large, forbidding structure of Colonial design. With his heart in his throat he moved as noiselessly as possible, still feeling his way along the hedge, which also bordered the walk. His feet eventually encountered the steps of the porch and he tip-toed up, expecting to hear a creak at every move.

When he was half way to the door, the porch was suddenly flooded with light from within and, simultaneously with its appearance, there was a shrill feminine shriek. The door opened precipitately and the tall stranger rushed out, knocking Tony off balance in his dash for the road.

On the floor boards of the porch, still slippery from the rain, Tony lost his footing and fell heavily. By the time he picked himself up he heard the roar of a starting motor and the high-powered roadster was literally jerked into motion and away. Before he could even collect his scattered wits the lights had vanished around a bend in the road.

He turned to the still open door and was astonished to see a crumpled figure at the foot of a winding stair that led upward from the spacious foyer within. Seeing that this was a woman in a dressing gown, he hastily stepped in. The figure lay in a heap, face down, a mass of tumbled golden hair spread over the head and shoulders like a glistening mantle. Carefully he turned the limp body over and saw that it was that of a beautiful girl, hardly out of her teens. A sigh from her told him this was only a faint and he experienced an immediate feeling of relief.

The girl opened her eyes and gazed at him, horror-stricken. Then she sat up suddenly and blinked as if to clear her vision.

“Who — who are you?” she asked fearfully.

“I am Anthony Russell,” replied Tony hastily, “don’t be alarmed. I was passing and saw strange happenings in the house, so I came in. Can I help you?”

He assisted the girl to her feet and she leaned against him a moment for support, then burst into wild sobbing.

“Oh, oh!” she wailed, “poor father! He’s been killed. And Bob was here—they’ll get him! What shall I do?”

“Who is Bob? And did he kill him?” asked Tony excitedly.

“No! No!” answered the girl hysterically, “I know nothing. I was asleep. The voices awoke me and I came to the head of the stairs. I saw — I saw — ”

She bit her lip and the great brown eyes widened in horror. Gazing pleadingly at Tony, she pulled her dressing gown tightly about her slim body and started slowly up the stairs.

“But can’t I do anything, Miss?” he asked, in agitation, “surely you’re not alone in this house with your father’s body, and with a murderer escaping at the moment? There may be accomplices about.”

She turned toward him and again started sobbing. Leaning on the stair rail to steady herself, she said, “Yes, you can help. And please excuse my rudeness. But it is all so horrible I can’t think — can’t reason yet.”

“Where are the servants?” he asked.

“There are but two and this is their night off. But please don’t ask me any more questions now.”

Something altered the girl’s expression. A look of horror and fear suddenly hardened into stern resolve as she tottered and seemed about to faint once more.

Tony assisted her to a settee in the second floor hall.

“Now, you stay right here,” he said in a tone of authority, “and I’ll go in and see if something can be done for your father. He may not be dead after all.”

“Oh no,” she said hopelessly, “he’s dead. I’m sure he is. But you can satisfy yourself if you wish. Through that door on the right.”

Advancing into the room where lay the body, Tony felt the chill of death in the air. But he knelt beside the huddled form and felt for the pulse of the victim. Obviously the body had been untouched, since it was still crumpled in a grotesque heap beneath the window sill. With a shudder of distaste he straightened the twisted limbs and stretched the body to a prone position, observing as he did so that there were no signs of blood

about the person of the pyjamaed man. He searched vainly and was unable to locate a wound of any sort whatsoever that might account for the man's sudden demise.

But he was dead — there was no doubt of that. Tony convinced himself of this at once and then sprang to his feet in sudden recollection. There had been no sound of a shot! He distinctly recalled his surprise at seeing the figure collapse so unexpectedly. And here was a body without a wound. It had flashed across his mind at the time that this must be a stroke of some kind brought about by the man's evident anger. How then had this man been killed?

And it was stranger still that the victim should be old Van Alstyne. Tony recognized him at once as the cold-blooded financier who had, within the past week, increased his already tremendous wealth by some eighty millions in one of the most Spectacular big business mergers of the decade. And the papers were still reviling him, still darkly hinting of political intrigue, of the illegality of some of his operations, of widows robbed of their savings to swell his own coffers. Quite probably the theory of the stroke was the correct one after all, he thought.

At the sound of the girl's voice from the doorway Tony turned abruptly from his contemplation of the body. So this was Margaret Van Alstyne, debutante daughter of the great man.

"He's dead?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes, I'm afraid he is. But it may be that he died a natural death. He has no wounds. We must call the police."

"No! Not that!" the girl almost shrieked, "call Doctor Joyce. But not the police — yet. Please say you won't."

Tony looked his amazement. Her agitation was undoubtedly extreme. Surely this sweet girl had not murdered her own father, he thought. Surely this Bob she had spoken of was not her lover and had killed the old man in the argument he had witnessed. But he put these thoughts from his mind at once. They were too absurd to be considered.

"All right, Miss," he agreed, "we'll call the doctor."

Her eyes widened in terror as he spoke. Her face blanched and she stretched forth a shaking forefinger that pointed past him toward the body. With a scream that echoed through the empty house like the despairing cry of a lost soul she slumped to the floor in another swoon. Tony hastily turned in the direction she had pointed. Van Alstyne's body had disappeared! But the pyjamas lay in a crumpled pile, still outlining the figure of the

corpse in the position it had lain. It was as if the body had dissolved into thin air, leaving its covering behind — empty.

“Well, I’m damned!” he exclaimed in amazement. Then he turned once more to the girl to start the work of restoring her. No wonder she had fainted!

CHAPTER III – Comparing Notes

AS Ward Platt and Charlie Frazee discussed the problem which had been turned over to them by the mayor there was a ring at the telephone in the conference room they occupied. Ward answered the ring and then, passed the telephone instrument to his partner.

“Long distance for you, Charlie,” he said.

“Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Frazee speaking,” Charlie repeated mechanically into the transmitter, “oh — hello, Tony. Glad to hear from you. What’s that? Van Alstyne’s dead? His body vanished?” Ward Platt sat forward, startled into close attention as his partner listened closely to the words spoken so rapidly at the other end of the wire. An occasional interruption by his partner gave him a fairly good inkling of the drift of the conversation and his mind instantly associated this new development with the strange happening in the subway. When Charlie eventually hung up the receiver he turned to his partner with amazement written all over his features.

“That was Tony Russell,” he said, “he’s up in Cartersville at old Van Alstyne’s country home. Happened to be passing by and saw the old man apparently killed. Rushed into the house and found him dead but with no wounds. Margaret, the daughter, you know, was there and suspected someone of the murder but Tony could find no evidence; that he had been murdered. No bullet or knife wounds. Then, while he was talking with the girl the body vanished from before their very eyes. The girl’s gone, too, now and Tony’s nearly bughouse. Evidently fell for her. I told him to hurry down here, as you overheard. But, isn’t it the darnedest thing you ever heard of — next to the subway mystery?”

“Yes. And I can’t help tying the two events together somehow.”

“Me too. These sure are queer doings.”

Four hours later the two engineers returned to their office, more completely mystified than ever. They had examined every foot of the tunnel from which the train had vanished and were unable to find the slightest evidence upon which a theory could be based. It was an impasse that stumped them and left them at their wits’ ends. A feeling of relief came to the two men when they were advised that Anthony Russell awaited their

return. Here at least was a new angle to the mystery — something else to discuss and puzzle over.

Tony and Charlie greeted each other effusively. They were fraternity brothers and had been closely associated during their college years.

Ward Platt took an instant liking to the young man who was the friend of his partner. “What is your business, Mr. Russell?” he asked, after the formality of the introduction was over.

“Tony’s an inventor,” laughed Charlie, before his friend could reply, “but one of those rare specimens with a head for business along with the genius. He’s president of the Russell Television Corporation.”

“Fine. Fine,” said Ward, “I must congratulate you on the wonderful work that has been done by your outfit. Maybe you can help us in the job we have before us. Have you heard about the mysteriously missing subway train?”

“Just read about it on the way down,” replied Tony, “are the newspaper accounts true?”

“They are,” said Ward solemnly, “and it is a strange parallel to the case of old Van Alstyne’s body.”

“Yes,” replied Tony, “I was struck with that idea as soon as I read of the tunnel mystery. What on earth can it mean?”

“That’s what Hamlin has commissioned Charlie and me to find out,” said Ward dryly, “but, suppose we discuss it at lunch. It is way past the hour.”

The three men were soon on the street and on their way to the Astor afoot. They chatted lightly as they elbowed through the crowds that packed the vicinity of Times Square. The mystery of the subway tunnel was on every tongue and they found no little amusement at some of the remarks of the excited passersby. The congestion of traffic was terrific and, as they crossed Broadway and turned northward alongside the Times Building, they found great difficulty in progressing toward their destination. There was a startled exclamation from Tony and he attempted to make his way from his companions in the direction of someone he had seen in the crowd.

“Margaret Van Alstyne!” he repeated, when questioned by Charlie, “there, up ahead. She’s about to enter the subway kiosk.”

He struggled and pushed to force his way in the direction pointed out and, by dint of much tussling with exasperated and complaining pedestrians, finally managed to reach

the entrance through which the girl had disappeared. Down the stairs he clattered and it was several minutes before Ward and Charlie were able to follow.

When they did reach the stairway Tony was not in sight so they decided to wait for his return.

“Guess he’s gone on the girl all right,” commented Charlie, “and looked scared to death. Did you notice her?”

“No,” answered Ward, “she was too quick for me. And I hope too quick for Tony. If he becomes involved in a wild goose chase after this young woman, we may not be able to use him in the task that confronts us. I have an idea he may be of great assistance if we can keep him put on the job.”

“No doubt of that,” agreed Charlie, “the boy has a wonderful brain and has had a raft of experience in all sorts of research. He was the shining light in the physical lab at college and has dabbled a whole lot in pure science ever since. It’s a hobby with him and he is smart enough not to let it interfere with his success in business. But here he comes — alone.”

Joining Forces

IT was a disconsolate Tony who greeted them at the turnstile through which they had not passed. He was out of breath from his efforts in attempting to overtake the girl.

“Missed her,” he said gloomily, “she ran for a down-town express and I just reached it in time to have the doors close in my face.”

“Never mind, old man,” said Charlie, “she’s probably on her way to visit relatives until she gets over the shock of her father’s passing. I shouldn’t worry if I were you.”

“That’s right, Mr. Russell,” chimed in the cheery voice of Ward Platt, “you’ll find her later. Come on now — let’s eat,”

Tem minutes later, in the comparative quiet of the Astor grill room, the three men continued the discussion of the strange events of the past night.

“So you think there is some connection between the Van. Alstyne case and the disappearance of the subway train?” asked Tony.

“Yes I do,” replied Ward, “though I have no real reason, other than that both cases are similarly baffling and unprecedented. You say that Miss Van Alstyne left the house shortly after the discovery that her father’s body had vanished?”

“Yes,” said Tony, “after she recovered from her swoon, I called the local police and they arrived on the scene before dawn. They questioned us and Miss Van Alstyne seemed ill at ease when the name of her brother was brought up. It seems that this

nocturnal visitor in the high powered car was young. Bob Van Alstyne and it was quite evident that she feared he was involved in the crime. Of course she wanted to protect him because, from what I learned up there, she is unduly fond of this worthless brother of hers. It developed that his argument with the old man was brought about by a demand for more funds to carry him on his downward path among the gamblers and gangsters of the white-light district. But I am sure the girl was mystified as were the police, and, of course, they could not hold her, since there is no evidence that her father was actually killed. The corpus delicti not being producible, you know.”

“There were no sounds in the room when the body vanished?” asked Ward.

“Not a sound, and, though my back was turned to the corpse, Miss Van Alstyne swore she heard none and that she saw nothing except a sudden deflation of the corpse-filled pyjamas which appeared to slump to the floor in a sort of a mist that left the clothing empty when it cleared.”

“Sounds like witchcraft,” laughed Charlie.

“Not more so than the subway incident,” said Ward, “and one can not blame the man on the street for suspecting something of the sort. Both occurrences are uncanny, to say the least, but I have a feeling that the solution of one will lead to the solution of the other.”

“How do you expect me to assist?” asked Tony. “My idea is this,” was Ward’s reply, “your company must have in stock a considerable number of television transmitters and receivers of the latest type and, if so, it is my thought that we might equip every train that enters the tunnel with one of the transmitters so that any further happening can be watched from a distance. Undoubtedly there will be repetitions of the incident.”

“You think so?” asked Tony with great concern. “I do.”

“Well, we have plenty of television instruments out at the factory in Long Island City and I can put a force of men at work on a moment’s notice installing them wherever they may be needed.” “Good,” said Ward, “then, when we return to my office, I’ll get in touch with the proper authorities at once and arrange for their installation on a number of trains to be sent through the tube. It may take days of watching, but I am confident we shall learn something by this means.”

“But,” objected Charlie, “suppose the perpetrator of these outrages strikes at some other point next time? If the same hand that wiped the train out of existence accounted for Van Alstyne as well, there is no reason to suppose it can not strike at any desired point.”

“A reasonable supposition, Charlie. But somehow I feel there is something big behind this and that the thing is being accomplished by scientific means that have been in the course of development for years. I think that a definite program is planned by someone who has erected mechanisms of some sort at a number of points where they may be operated to accomplish the desired results. But I do not feel that the train was wiped out of existence. I think that it was stolen intact and that its occupants are still alive, though they may be in grave danger. The apparatus, whatever its nature, that was involved in the removing of that train from the tube must be of great power and tremendous cost and can hardly have been duplicated at other points. Possibly there may be individual cases at other points similar to that of Van Alstyne but, as far as the wholesale kidnapping of a trainload of people is concerned, I hardly think we may look for its duplication at other localities.”

The Third Blow

THE subject was discussed for a full hour during and after lunch and the three men returned to the office of the engineers with a well-formed plan in mind.

When they arrived Ward Platt was informed that the mayor had been trying to get him by telephone for more than three quarters of an hour and that he seemed most anxious to get in touch with him.

“Something’s happened already,” said Ward, “as sure as you are a foot high.”

He called the mayor’s office immediately and was soon conversing with that official.

A few minutes later he replaced the receiver carefully and faced his companions with a set expression of determination in his gray eyes and in the angle of his chin.

“You got most of it?” he asked.

“There was another?” asked Tony.

“Yes, an eight car express lost in the same spot. Just as I predicted.”

“What time did it happen?” asked Charlie. “While we were at lunch. The train left Times Square at 2:10 and was reported out of Chambers Street at 2:29. They’re not running them very fast you know. And it is being kept out of the papers for the present.”

Tony jumped to his feet and his face took on a ghastly expression of fear. “Two-tem from Times Square, did you say ?” he intoned in a fear-deadened voice, “good God, fellows! Margaret Van Alstyne was on that train. I looked at my watch as it pulled out of the station.”

CHAPTER IV – On The Trail

ANTHONY RUSSELL labored incessantly all through that night and he drove his force of installation engineers unmercifully. By morning there had been completed the installation of television and radio transmitters and receivers on eighteen trains of the West Side subway and, in addition, six complete outfits were installed in the tunnel itself. These were distributed at equally spaced points of vantage and were of the remote control type so. That no operators were required to keep them in service. A central observation and control apparatus was erected in the director's room of his Wall Street office and here it was possible to view simultaneously the images transmitted from the various instruments installed in the tunnel and trains.

The news of the disappearance of the second train leaked out through the efforts of an overzealous reporter of one of the tabloid newspapers and the metropolitan district was in an uproar. Although both accidents had occurred in the tunnel of the West Side line of the Interborough, it was practically impossible to convince the public that it was safe to ride through any of the other tunnels. When the early morning rush hour commenced, the ferries over the north river were crowded to capacity. The new Hudson River bridge carried an increasingly heavy traffic and the bridges over the East River groaned beneath their unaccustomed loads. Regular train service was maintained in the Hudson tubes but the travelers were few and far between. Traffic on all lines of the Interborough, B. M. T. and the new Eighth Avenue subway was normal in Manhattan, but trains were not continued below Wall Street nor across the East River excepting on those lines which crossed the bridges. On the Brooklyn side, Borough Hall station became the terminal for the Interborough lines and traffic through the tunnel of disaster was limited to two trains in each direction, which were to ply back and forth between Wall Street and Borough Hall; each manned by a company of National Guard and a detail of police. The television radio equipment on these trains and in the tunnel was placed in operation at an early hour.

Tony insisted on riding the first train that entered the tunnel and Charlie Frazee accompanied him. Ward Platt, with the mayor and other city officials, occupied the room of the many television screens and watched with interest the manipulations of the operators of the Russell Television Corporation as they made the adjustments that brought into view on six separate screens the images from the stationary transmitters in the tunnel. Then contact was obtained with the instruments on the four trains to be shuttled through the tube. The entire interior of the forward car of each train was pictured in its individual

screen and a second transmitter on the forward end of the car recorded a view of the tunnel ahead. There were thus fourteen screens in operation at the central viewing station, with the result that the scene was thoroughly covered.

As the first train pulled out of the station, Ward Platt watched the screen picturing the interior of the first car. Here were visible the tense faces of Tony and Charlie, behind whom were gathered a group of police and militia, all straining to obtain a view of the tracks and tunnel ahead. The radio loudspeaker was connected to the receiver tuned to the instrument on this train and Ward spoke into the microphone, bidding his partner good luck.

Charlie smiled and returned the greeting. "Don't worry about us. Ward," he said, "We'll come through all right and we're going to see this thing to a finish. But Tony's, worried about the lady."

Tony grinned somewhat sheepishly at this. "Frankly I am, Mr. Platt," he said, "I know she was on the last train lost and have a premonition that, she did not leave the train in Manhattan. If that is the case, she is lost with the rest of the passengers."

"But you have no certain knowledge of that," said Ward, "She might have left the train at Fourteenth or Chambers or any of the stations on the way down. She is probably safe somewhere in Manhattan at the present moment."

But Tony shook his head gloomily at this. He was not to be convinced.

The Hunters Caught

THE train was gathering speed and the watchers at the screens transferred their gaze to the view of the tunnel ahead of it. It seemed that they were riding the front of the train themselves, so realistically were the onrushing tracks and tunnel walls portrayed. When the lowest point was reached, or about half way through the tube, a sudden flare of red light appeared in the space between the tracks and only about a hundred feet ahead. Through the loudspeaker came the screaming of the brakes as they were applied with full pressure. A quick glance to the other screen showed the occupants of the front car thrown into struggling heaps by the sudden jar, and yells of surprise and pain mingled with the jarring clatter of the stopping train.

"Looks like we're in for it!" shouted Charlie, picking himself to his feet and staring from the front window of the car.

The gaze of the watchers in Russell's office shifted once more to the forward screen and there they observed the sudden changing color of the warning light. It flared

high, changing slowly from its brilliant red to a pale violet glow that seemed to creep along the track toward the ill-fated train. Then one of the operators uttered a startled cry.

“Look!” he said, pointing a shaky finger to another of the screens.

This one received the image from one of the permanent transmitters in the tunnel and it pictured the train itself from the rear. The violet haze had surrounded the metal-work of the cars and from every corner and angle there glowed sparkling pinpoints of light that sputtered and blinded the watchers like miniature explosions of flash powder.

The tracks and bottom wall of the tube glowed brilliantly with the same eerie light and suddenly they vanished from view. The bottom seemed to have dropped from the tunnel, leaving a huge brightly lighted space beneath. But the train remained intact, seemingly poised in mid-air. Then, slowly, surely it was lowered into the great opening, apparently dropped by hydraulic jacks or other deliberate means. Before they could exclaim their astonishment the normal light of the tube was restored and to their amazed eyes the tracks and tunnel floor were in their original solid and uninterrupted condition.

A shout came from the loudspeaker and the watchers turned to the other screens. Inside the car could be seen Charlie and Tony, their faces frozen in unnatural grimaces. Behind them there appeared the rigid forms of a number of soldiers and police, all frozen to immobility and seemingly unable to move a muscle. Tony grew red in the face in an ineffectual attempt to speak. His features contorted painfully but he was unable to utter a word. Then came the sound of shouting from outside the car, and the watchers turned to the outside viewing screen.

The view pictured an immense cavern, crowded with creatures, at first sight of which, the mayor uttered an involuntary cry of disgust and fear. Monstrous apes, they seemed to be. But those in closest proximity faced the watchers with evilly leering human countenances. Then these were thrust aside unceremoniously by a man who approached the train with extreme anger in his glittering eyes and with shouts of impatience to his inhuman companions.

“Curse them!” he yelled, “They’ve got a television instrument on this car.”

His glowering face loomed large in the screen. A large iron bar was raised and, just as Ward Platt let forth a cry of recognition, there was a crash and the screen went blank. Simultaneously with the blotting out of the view in this screen, there was a confused sound from the loudspeaker and, on again turning to the inner screen, the lights in the car were seen to go out. In the dim light the frozen forms of the occupants stood immovable like wooden soldiers. Then there was another crash and complete darkness.

The six viewing screens connected to the permanent transmitters in the tunnel showed the normally dim-lit tube intact, but empty.

The mayor turned to Ward in amazement. "Did you recognize the man who approached and destroyed the first transmitter?" he asked.

"Yes," breathed Ward, "It was Jeremiah Talbot!"

A Recognition

WHEN the red light appeared in the tunnel, those on board the train were astonished beyond measure, but when it merged into the unholy violet radiance they were gripped by some unseen power that rendered each and every one as immovable as if moulded from bronze. Those in the rear cars who had not the warning accorded to those up front, struggled mightily against the unexpected and unseen enemy but to no avail. The car floors beneath their feet hummed with a not unmusical vibration. The unearthly radiance surrounding the cars held them awe-struck and fascinated. They were helpless to touch their rifles or pistols.

Into the cavern below, dropped the eight massive steel cars with their paralyzed human freight. A slight droning of machinery beneath told of the purely physical accomplishment of the task, but the motion was so smooth and steady as to give the impression of being carried out by some supernatural agency. ' It seemed they were in a dream from which they must soon awaken.

But there was nothing dreamlike about the contact of the squat hairy bodies that soon crowded into the cars and, in the semi-darkness, lifted the helpless figures of the passengers and carried them to the outside. In the blue-white light of the cavern these bodies were made out as those of a strange breed of creatures, part human, part beast. Huge, barrel-like chests characterized these strange simian monsters who wore trousers like men but exposed the naked, hairy upper, portions of their bodies without covering. Beady deep-set, black eyes peered out from beneath bushy brows in chalky-white faces of human mould. And, strangest of all, these faces were not malicious in repose. They were more like the hopelessly vacant visages of incurable idiots. Only when the creatures smiled, if their grimaces could be called smiles, were the faces evil. Of not more than five feet in height, their thick bodies surmounting uniformly bowed legs, they gave the impression of tremendous strength. And the pressure exerted on the bodies of the victims by some of those long arms left mute evidence of this strength in the form of bruises and abrasions.

The members of the police and the militia were laid on the rock floor of the cavern in long rows as if being prepared for burial. Then, when all had been removed from the train, a man, a white man garbed in gray woollens of excellent quality and cut, walked along the line and sneeringly regarded his captives. When he came to Tony and Charlie, he stopped abruptly.

“So,” he said, “At last we have two scientists among us. Welcome to our realm.”

He laughed aloud and to Tony’s numbed senses there came the recollection of having heard that laugh before. But he could not move his head, could scarce roll his tortured eyes, so it was impossible for him to see the features of his captor.

“And now, Mr. Anthony Russell,” continued the familiar voice, “We’ll free you and your friend. At least you did not come against me armed.”

He directed four of the monsters to carry the two men to an adjoining cavern and, as Tony was lifted to the shoulders of two of the creatures, he saw from the corner of his eye that the train they had so recently occupied was slowly moving down a section of track to join two others that occupied a siding in a dim recess of the great excavation. Above him hung the damp, rounded lower surface of the tube from which they had been kidnapped. The cavern had been hollowed from the solid rock beneath and the tube itself was shored up on both sides with rows of strong columns which prevented its collapse into the opening below.

After being carried for some considerable distance along a passage where the only illumination was from hand lights carried by their captors, Tony and Charlie were brought into a large room which might have been the drawing room of a luxurious mansion. It was lighted in the most modern manner and furnished sumptuously and elegantly. At the far side of the room there was a great oak cabinet which at first glance appeared to be a huge wardrobe. The two men were placed on their feet before this massive piece of furniture and its doors were opened. There was a click and the entire face of the cabinet belched forth a breath of heated incandescence that nearly threw them to the floor. But, when the dazzling brilliancy abated, they found that their muscles were once more in normal condition and that they could move their limbs freely.

Tony wheeled about to face his captors and found himself gazing into the grinning countenance of the man of the gray flannels.

“Jerry Talbot!” he gasped.

CHAPTER V - Talbot Explains

THE strangely silent beast-men retired from the room while Tony stared in open astonishment at the debonair figure he faced.

“Yes, Tony,” said his unabashed captor, “it is I, Jeremiah Talbot. You are surprised to see me alive — and here ?”

“Surprised?” exclaimed Tony, when he was able to speak, “Why, Jerry — you have been reported dead these seven years. Your mother and sister have mourned you, and all your friends considered you as no longer in the land of the living. What on earth really happened, and what are you doing in these strange surroundings and engaged in this nefarious work with these unearthly monsters?”

“It is a long story,” replied Talbot, “But there is no hurry to relate it. You are going to be with me for a long while — from now on, as a matter of fact. Who is your friend ?”

“Excuse me, Jerry. This is Charlie Frazee, the television radio wizard — Jerry Talbot, former Research Engineer of the Union Electric Company.” “How do you do, Mr. Talbot,” responded Charlie, politely yet somewhat stiffly, “I remember your work and the cause of your disappearance in the company of Professor Ainsworth.”

“Glad to meet you,” replied their host with smiling equanimity, “It appears though that you are not as pleased to meet me. However, we’ll let it pass. So you are responsible for the installation of the transmitters on the trains?”

“Yes,” said Charlie haughtily, “and at a number of points in the tunnel as well. Our friends above are fully aware of what has happened now.”

“So?” grinned Talbot, “What little they know will avail them nothing. And this is but the beginning.”

Tony grew impatient. Not only did the calm superiority of the long-lost Jerry Talbot annoy him, but he was anxious to hear more of the purpose of this warfare against the people of the great metropolitan district.

“But, Jerry,” he interrupted, “What is this all about? How came you to be here? Who or what are these strange beasts, and why are you warring on the city?”

Talbot laughed, a light of fanaticism glinting from his piercing black eyes. “One question at a time, my dear Tony; And, as I previously remarked, there is plenty of time.”

“Surely you do not intend to keep us here?” asked Tony incredulously.

“Nothing else but. You are never to see the light of day again, nor are any of those I have kidnapped — unless — but that can wait also.”

“This man is a criminal of the worst sort,” blurted Charlie, “But, he’ll get his just deserts. I’ll wager he murdered old Van Alstyne, too.”

“We shall indulge in no further remarks of that sort, Mr. Frazee,” said Talbot, with a threatening steeliness of tone, “Yes, I did remove that old rascal, Van Alstyne. And, further than that, his daughter is now in our fair realm, a prisoner of war.”

Tony bristled. “You’ll not harm her, Jerry!” he warned.

“Oh ho!” said Talbot, “So the wind blows that way? But, you can rest easy on that score. The girl will not be injured. And now, get this straight

I promise that no harm shall come to you nor to your friend, Frazee, who is glowering at me so threateningly. But you must not misunderstand your position. You are prisoners in this subterranean empire of which Ainsworth and I are the absolute monarchs. It is impossible for you to escape and if you attempt to disrupt our plans or to indulge in violence of any kind, you will be summarily dealt with.”

“Then Ainsworth is here, also?” asked Tony interestedly.

“Yes, indeed. When we left in my plane to escape the undesirable publicity given to our experiments in creative surgery, we had a definite plan in mind. But we had no idea that we were to become involved in so stupendous a thing as has developed. In the wilds of Labrador, Ainsworth had a secret laboratory which has since been discovered — denuded of its apparatus. We headed for this laboratory with the intention of marooning ourselves for many years to carry on the work of making humans from the lower animals. Wells’ Doctor Moreau in real life, you know. But the plane crashed before we reached our destination and we were forced to carry on in the direction of his laboratory on foot. Luckily we had escaped injury in the crash but the hardships of that attempt to reach the laboratory were terrible. After two days and nights we were overtaken by a blizzard which made continued progress impossible and we took refuge in a cave about a hundred and fifty miles northwest of Shipiskan Lake. This was the beginning of our good fortune.”

“But your plane was found completely consumed by fire and with the remains of human bones in the wreckage,” objected Tony.

“But your plane was found completely consumed by fire and with the remains of human bones in the wreckage,” objected Tony.

“Yes. We returned later and set fire to it to throw any inquisitive searchers off the track. The bones were not human — though nearly human.”

An Underground Empire

TONY shuddered involuntarily as he thought of the ape-men who had carried him.

“That cavern,” continued Talbot, “was snowbound within a very few hours, but we were quite comfortable and had provisions in our packs for a long stay. After some time of inactivity we decided to explore our refuge and our pocket flash lamps were brought into play. We soon found that the small cavern was but the entrance to a much larger one which lay at a considerably lower level. It was a strange experience to be prowling about in this underground chamber but we carried on until we finally came to a small ledge that projected from a wall of the cavern and which appeared to extend back into still another opening. By standing on Ainsworth’s shoulders I was able to clamber onto’ this ledge and, when I had pulled him up after me, we discovered that a narrow passage led in to the solid rock from the point where the ledge joined the wall of the main cavern. It would bore you were I to recount all of our adventures but, after miles and miles of following winding passages and exploring many interconnecting caverns, we finally came upon the great discovery. Gentlemen, there is a vast underground world beneath this continent of North America and you now stand in one of its many many connecting divisions.”

“What!” exclaimed Tony and Charlie as one voice.

“It is the plain, unvarnished truth,” said. Talbot.

“Do you mean to say,” asked Tony, “that these caverns and passages extend clear down into the United States?”

“Precisely. Not only that, but they cover almost the entire continent east of the Mississippi. There are thousands of miles of passage and thousands of great caverns, one so large that’ it contains two lakes of the approximate size of Lake Erie and Ontario. But, some of this you shall see so there is little use in describing it to you at this time.”

“These ape-men, though,” asked Tony, “Are these the normal inhabitants of this realm?”

“Yes and no. Those you have seen are a development of the natives we found. Others are in a higher state of development and still others are still in their natural state. These you shall see also.”

“Are there many of these creatures?” Tony inquired.

“Ainsworth has estimated their number as about fifteen million.”

“Holy smoke!” ejaculated Tony, “And you have them all under control?”

“Absolutely. To them we are gods. And why not? We have lifted them out of their savagery and have provided them with many of the comforts of modern civilization. Some of them we have even given — brains.”

Charlie listened in stubborn disapproval, but Tony was extremely interested. "But the money, the wealth it must involve to do such things as you have done here!" he objected.

Talbot smiled wryly. "Yes, I know my father was financially ruined six years ago and that he committed suicide in consequence," he stated, "Van Alstyne did that, but still I withheld my hand. Mother had been left with nearly a hundred thousand of her own so she could manage fairly well. But, within the past few weeks, Van Alstyne took from her. This was too much, so I — removed him, as you know."

Tony recoiled before the look of fierce vengeance in Talbot's eyes, but he could scarce blame him for his feeling. The expression of Charlie's face softened somewhat as he listened.

"But how on earth did you do it?" asked Tony.

"There is much to tell," replied Talbot, "But first we shall visit Ainsworth. I have an idea he will welcome you both rather gladly. And, for all your seeming incarceration, do not think that you are going to be unhappy with us. It is a pleasant life and, after a few years, you will quite enjoy it, I am sure."

Tony shrugged his shoulders at Charlie's meaning look. "Well," he said, once more addressing Talbot, "May I ask one favor?"

"You wish to see Miss Van Alstyne?" smiled their host.

"It shall be as you wish," agreed Talbot, leading the way toward a curtained recess at one side of the huge room.

An Underground Journey

HE parted the curtains and there was revealed the cage of an elevator, modern in every detail. When they had entered the cage he closed the door and pressed a button, whereupon the car dropped swiftly into its smooth-walled shaft. For an interminable period they dropped with ever increasing speed and Anally Charlie could hold himself no longer.

"How deep is this shaft?" he asked.

"Something like four miles," answered Talbot.

"Four miles!" gasped Charlie, "You have cables of that length?"

"There are no cables on this car. We are falling by gravity. But it is under control and will be neutralized before we reach the bottom."

“Neutralized?” asked Tony, “Then you have discovered the fundamental laws of gravity and have learned to counteract them?”

“Yes,” smiled Talbot, “But that is only one of the many remarkable discoveries that Ainsworth and I have worked out in our underground laboratories.”

“Evidently,” agreed Charlie, “Not the least of them, I should say, is the stealing of a subway train from under the river and leaving the tube intact.”

“That is a pretty good stunt,” replied Talbot, “But, when you are acquainted with the mysteries of the fourth dimension, it is really quite simple.”

“The fourth dimension? Time?” asked Tony.

“No, not time. That is an erroneous impression that is in quite general acceptance above. No, the fourth dimension is not time. But you shall learn of that later. Here we are.”

The cage had slowed down and now came to a gentle stop at the brightly lighted entrance to a long, rock-walled passage. As they proceeded down this passage, Tony and Charlie noted the smoothness of its walls, which appeared as if the opening had been fused into the solid rock by some tremendous heat that left the sides as glossy as glazed porcelain. The lighting was from translucent globes overhead that shed a soft radiance that was as revealing as the glare of sunlight, yet restful and soothing to the eye.

“I can not understand, Jerry,” said Tony, as they walked along the passageway, “how on earth all of this work has been accomplished in the few short years you have been here. I presume that none of these workings existed before your coming?”

“Of course not. The natives were absolutely ignorant. But they are powerful and are good imitators and tireless workers. Besides, Ainsworth and I have control of certain forces that are unknown up above and that make work of this sort much simpler in Subterranea, as we have named our hidden country.”

“One thing I have noticed,” said Charlie, displaying his first real sign of interest, “is that all of the caverns are lighted by artificial means. If the natives of this great underground realm lived in darkness before you, and Ainsworth arrived to introduce them to modern improvements, how is it that they have perfect organs of sight. I should think they would be without eyes, like the fish in the waters of some of the caves of Kentucky and West Virginia.”

“Oh, but they did not live in darkness before we came. These are all artificial caverns you have seen. The larger natural caverns are lighted by phosphorescent materials in the walls and roofs. This light is not as bright as sunlight, of course, but is sufficiently

bright for normal sight and will permit of reading without difficulty. There is no night in Subterranea unless one enters the smaller connecting caverns or passages where there is no phosphorescence.”

They now emerged into a larger chamber and, following their guide, proceeded up a gentle incline to a large, metal-studded door. Talbot inserted a key into its lock and they entered the strangest room they had ever seen. It was reminiscent of one of the buildings of a large prison, excepting that there were no barred cell doors. Instead there were tier upon tier of rooms around the sides and, for some seven or eight floors above, each tier of rooms was surrounded by a balcony that could be reached only by a small lift that connected the various levels. Talbot led them to one of the many doors on the main floor and this opened at his manipulation of a dial on its surface like the combination of a safe.

The opening of the small metal door revealed to their gaze a plainly but well-furnished room. At their entrance a young girl, with golden locks about her shoulders in enchanting disarray, sprang from a divan where she had been reading and jumped to her feet in some alarm. It was Margaret Van Alstyne and when she saw Tony she flushed with pleasure and advanced to him with outstretched hands.

“Anthony—Mr. Russell,” she faltered, “You have come for me?”

CHAPTER VI – Tony Accepts Confinement

TALBOT observed with an ironic smile the somewhat embarrassed greetings exchanged by Tony and Miss Van Alstyne.

“I’ll answer your question, Miss Van Alstyne,” he said, “Mr. Russell has not come for you. Like yourself, he is a prisoner. But it is my pleasure that you be given the freedom of Subterranea and I shall release you from your present confinement in Mr. Russell’s custody, provided he gives me his word of honor that no attempt be made to evade my law.”

Margaret looked at him with fear, not unmixed with curiosity.

“What is your law?” asked Tony.

“You are to become permanent residents of Subterranea,” replied Talbot, “and as such are subject to all laws of the realm as enacted and enforced by Ainsworth and me. In addition you are to make no attempts to communicate with those above us and are not to leave the confines of the city Olaka unless by my express permission.”

“If we do not agree?” asked Tony.

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. "Miss Van Alstyne will remain in solitary confinement and will later become a subject for our experiments. Understand me, Tony. It is with no tenderness toward the daughter of Wolf Van Alstyne that I make this offer. It is for the simple reason that I bear you some friendliness that dates back to . our college days and I know it will give you pleasure to have the young lady free and in your company. Do you accept the condition?"

Tony nodded slowly and unwillingly. Through his mind there rushed the remembrance of some of the "experiments" credited to Talbot and Ains. Worth by the newspapers some years before — experiments in which the alleged torturing of dumb animals figured to an extreme that was horrible to contemplate.

"Yes, I agree. I give you my word," he said. "Good," said Talbot, "now, we shall visit Ainsworth."

He failed to observe the wink that Charlie indulged in for Tony's benefit. Frazee had made no promise.

They returned to the elevator by which they had descended and were soon slipping rapidly deeper into the lower regions of the strange realm. As the car dropped speedily through the smooth shaft Tony remarked on the even temperature of the atmosphere.

"The temperature," said Talbot, in explanation, "is almost uniform at seventy-four degrees Fahrenheit the year around. This was a great surprise to us when we first came to Subterranea, for all evidence of mining and drilling operations above point to an average increase in temperature of one degree for each one hundred feet descent below the surface of the earth. This would mean a temperature of more than 500 degrees at ten miles below the surface but there are portions of our realm much deeper than that and the temperature is no greater than at this level. But we have accounted for this in the refrigerating effect produced by the evaporation of moisture in the larger areas where animal and vegetable life is abundant."

"Is the atmosphere of constant density and oxygen content?" asked Charlie.

"Yes, excepting for the difference accounted for by the varying pressures at different levels. The elimination of carbon dioxide and the replenishing of the oxygen supply is accomplished by the natural functioning of certain plants and fungi in much the same way as this is done on the surface. The relative humidity is high, but you will not find it uncomfortably so."

"There are no openings to the surface excepting the one in Labrador?" asked Charlie.

Talbot laughed. "That one has long since been sealed," he replied, "but there is one other by which we maintain unsuspected contact with the outer world. It is cleverly concealed in the heart of an unscalable mesa in Arizona."

"Then your domain does extend west of the Mississippi !" exclaimed Tony in surprise.

"Only to the one point," said Talbot, "and this connection is by a tunnel we have produced since our coming — a tunnel more than twelve hundred miles in length."

Tony whistled in astonishment. "Jerry," he said, "I have asked you before how such stupendous tasks have been performed — engineering marvels that cost millions of dollars and require years to accomplish on the surface — but you have evaded me."

Talbot grinned his appreciation. "Tony," he said, "you spoke of riches. Were Ainsworth and I to return to your world we would be the wealthiest men alive. There are untold millions in precious metals and gems here — billions, were they converted into American money. We could, if we wished, upset the money market of the world in a very few weeks. Some small amount of this vast wealth makes its way above through our agents who contract secretly for certain fabricated materials and machinery we can best obtain in this manner. But as to the years of labor and the necessity of employing great armies of workmen in engineering projects, there is no such necessity here.

"In addition to our 'discoveries in connection with the fourth dimension we have also discovered the secret of atomic disintegration. We have at our command an undreamed-of force that is released at the touch of a finger. Were it not under complete control — were it permitted to continue unchecked when once started — the annihilation of the world would result. The twelve hundred mile tunnel was bored in a matter of weeks by a carefully directed progressive disintegration of the material through which it passes. It is as straight and smooth as the bore of a rifle and the direction of the energy that produced the result was by the hands of Ainsworth and myself."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Tony, "no wonder you are so cocksure about what you can do in the way of imposing your will on the world. But what is the purpose of your enmity?"

Talbot scowled. "We'll leave that until we see Ainsworth," he responded shortly, "we change cars here."

Across Subterranea

THE cage halted at another large chamber where they found a small, torpedo-shaped car waiting in a smooth groove in the rock floor. They were led to the shiny metal side of the vehicle and Talbot opened a door that led into its padded interior.

“Enter,” he said, smiling as he handed Margaret into the openings

When they were all ensconced in cushioned seats that lined each side of the car, Talbot closed and bolted the door.

“It is eight hundred miles to Olaka,” he said, “but we’ll be there in an hour.”

“Na hour?” asked Charlie incredulously.

“Just about. And I must warn you to settle back deeply into the cushioned chair-backs. The acceleration is terrific and you will scarcely be able to move when we have reached full speed. Just sit quietly and do not worry about the deceleration when that is necessary, for the chairs rotate automatically at the instant it starts so that the pressure remains against your backs throughout the journey. Let’s go!”

The car started smoothly and silently, entering the black mouth of a tube of not more than twelve feet diameter. The whistle of the air compressed between the car sides and the bore of the tube soon rose to a shrill note that told of tremendous speed.

“How is the car propelled?” shouted Tony.

“Atomic energy,” replied Talbot, “it does not touch bottom or sides of the tube, but is supported on a cushion of the air it compresses during its journey.”

Tony turned his head with difficulty to look at Charlie. He nodded jerkily in wonder. They were traveling at about one thousand miles an hour and the pressure between their bodies and the air cushions behind them was so great that it was almost impossible to move a muscle. The uncomfortable position and the trouble in making themselves heard over the shrill note of the swift passage kept them silent throughout the remainder of the journey.

When the car reached its destination they stepped into the open with expressions of astonishment that caused Talbot to smile and chuckle.

“Why— why — it’s beautiful,” gasped Margaret.

They stood near the shore of a great body of water and, but for the different quality of light, it would have seemed that they were in the open air of their own world. Far overhead swept an arch of Seep green that merged into nothingness in the distance where its color seemed to melt into a fathomless distance comparable to the heavens themselves. It seemed that there were five blue-white suns in this firmament — but no stars. Open-mouthed they stared at the wonders and beauties of Subterranea.

“The suns,” explained Talbot, “are great patches of phosphorescent materials imbedded in the arched roof of this huge cavern. The farthest is some six hundred miles from this point and it is the largest of all.”

“Six — hundred — miles?” intoned Charlie, “for heaven’s sake, how large is this space?”

“It is more than seven hundred miles in length and well over four hundred in width,” said Talbot, “its two lakes, Atakna and Atakna-og, are the two of which I spoke previously. Olaka is but a few miles along the coast.

“And the height?” inquired Tony.

“Eighty miles at the zenith. We are nearly one hundred miles below Chicago where we now stand. This cavity is a huge air-bubble in the earth’s crust that was left during the process of cooling. It is the largest in Subterranea.”

“It is the most amazing thing I have ever witnessed,” said Tony, “who, in our world above, would suspect that such a world exists beneath their feet?”

The air was redolent of sweet odors of growing things and Margaret exclaimed again and again at the beauty of some new growth that attracted her attention. She had drawn a few feet from the three men and suddenly gasped as her eyes rested on a most unexpected sight.

“Na airplane!” she called out.

Again Talbot smiled as the two men turned to confirm her discovery. The airplane was a trim little thing of not more than thirty feet wing spread — a modern biplane of the cabin type and capable of seating five passengers. Tony and Charlie walked to the craft to inspect it and Margaret gurgled delightedly when Talbot informed her that the plane was to carry them to Olaka.

“Where’s the engine in the confounded thing?” Charlie was asking as Jerry and Margaret reached the plane. For, though there was the conventional propeller at the forward end of the boat-like body, there was no evidence of a driving motor.

“It’s in the shaft,” laughed Talbot.

“In the shaft?” ejaculated Tony, “for the love of Pete ! What is its power?”

“About three hundred horse. It is an atomic engine, using water as a fuel and is but three and a half inches in diameter and eight inches in length. The release of atomic energy from less than four pounds of water will drive the plane the full length of this cavern.”

Tony stared. "Great guns, Jerry," he gasped, "why aren't you in your rightful sphere? You'd revolutionize the world."

"Yes," growled Talbot, "and to whose advantage? Some rascal like Wolf Van Alstyne would maneuver things to his own benefit." He hesitated.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Miss Van Alstyne," he apologized, "I had forgotten your presence." Margaret raised her head proudly. "Granted," she replied without rancor.

An Attempted Rescue

AFTER a moment of embarrassed silence, the four clambered into the cabin of the plane and Talbot took his place in the pilot's seat. At a touch of his finger there was a whirl that rose to a muffled roar. The propeller spun rapidly and, with the stick pulled back as far as it would go, Talbot sent the plane into the air with a rush that carried it from the ground in less than twenty feet of taxiing. They swept out over the green-lit lake at tremendous speed and were soon out of sight of the shore. Overhead the misty green arch and the five blue-white suns shimmered with a wavering eeriness that reminded the visitors of the Aurora Borealis.

It was not a long trip to Olaka and, when the plane headed for the south shore of the lake and the sprawling city came into view the visitors exclaimed anew at what they saw.

A single magnificent building of some three hundred feet in height rose above the rest of the city. On all sides along the coast and back inland spread the streets and squat dwellings of the underground capital. Mere huts, these dwellings seemed to be. And they were circular-walled and domed like an igloo. But the oddest incongruity was the color scheme. The single main building which rose so majestically from the orderly rows of domed huts was of a rich golden yellow. The huts themselves presented all the colors of the rainbow and, chameleon-like, they changed color with the flickerings from the five light sources.

The view of the city was blotted out as the plane circled over the flat roof of the central building and in a moment Talbot had brought them to a perfect landing on the smooth surface.

"Welcome to Olaka," he said as they alighted. Five minutes later they were in the presence of Professor Ainsworth, that famous scientist of a few years back who had been disowned by his government and by his contemporaries.

The tall figure of the once noted savant bent tensely over a circular table that was placed in the exact center of a huge room that was cluttered with laboratory equipment. So absorbed was he that he did not look up from his close scrutiny of the table top until they had approached within a very few feet of where he stood.

“What is it, Prof?” asked Talbot, in a quiet voice.

The tall figure straightened at the question and, with hardly a glance at the newcomers or recognition of their presence, he pointed a long finger at the” table top.

“Look,” was his sole comment.

They all bent over the circular surface which proved to be the viewing screen of some sort of television apparatus. Tony drew a quick breath as he saw that the scene depicted was the interior of the subway tunnel at the point where the trains had disappeared. At the moving of a control lever the view shifted slowly from end to end of the tunnel, which was now brightly lighted by auxiliary flood lights of great power. It was packed with soldiery, armed to the teeth! And, at the exact spot where the last train had vanished from the viewers in New York, a gang of workmen was busily engaged in burning a way through the iron tunnel with acetylene torches!

Talbot chuckled sardonically, but Charlie groaned as he observed that Ward Platt was directing the labors of the welders.

“Has the shaft been closed off?” asked Talbot.

“A half hour since,” replied Ainsworth, “four miles of rock now separate them from our lower passages.”

“And the prisoners?”

“Are safely below. They’ll find no living beings when they break through into the cavern. All they’ll find is their silly subway trains — and eternity.”

“Good God!” cried Charlie, “you’ll not destroy them ?”

Ainsworth looked the speaker over coolly. “And why not ?” he asked.

“It’s murder — cold-blooded murder!” exclaimed Charlie.

“And what would they do with their rifles and machine guns if they reached us?” inquired the scientist.

There was no reply, for the three visitors were once more watching the screen intently.

A great section of the tunnel bottom had fallen into the cavern below and the opening thus created was ringed with soldiers, who were prepared to shoot on sight of the ape-men who had been glimpsed in that brief instant in the Wall Street viewing screens.

Ainsworth pressed a button at the edge of the table and the lights in the far-away cavern were extinguished. Then came the portable flood lights of the militia and rope ladders were dropped into the pit. Ward Platt was the first to clamber to the rock floor below and Charlie could not repress a useless cry of warning that sprang to his lips. The soldiers followed by hundreds and, when all were assembled in the great cavern, the watchers saw them prowl about and eventually come upon the abandoned trains where they reposed on the subterranean siding.

Ainsworth reached for another button and Charlie struck for his arm as he suddenly realized that this meant death to those distant hundreds of human beings — his friend and partner among them. But his blow, quickly as it struck, was too late. The button was pressed firmly before Charlie's fist struck the outstretched hand.

The screen was blotted out by a great burst of flame as a terrific explosion rent the air of the cavern. Then all was darkness.

Margaret screamed and Charlie cursed. Tony stared unbelievably. Ainsworth cackled with the glee of a madman, the while he rubbed his bruised arm. Talbot twisted the corners of his mouth into his derisive smile.

CHAPTER VII – Into the Fourth Dimension

STUNNED into a moment of inactivity, Charlie quickly recovered and, with a roar like a lion, sprang for the throat of the man who had wrought the destruction. But Talbot had anticipated some such move and, before Charlie could reach his intended victim, there flashed into sudden view a crackling blue flame that contacted with the body of the leaping man with a blinding impact. There was an instantaneous rumble in the air of the room — then a jarring thump that seemed to twist the supports of the building. In Talbot's extended hand there was a glowing bulb from which the energy had emanated. And on the spot Where Charlie's lithe body had met with the strange force there was — nothing. Charlie had vanished as completely as had the body of Wolf Van Alstyne!

Margaret paled and bit her trembling lip. Tony rubbed his eyes in disbelief.

"You've killed him!" he gasped.

"No," replied Talbot, "I have better uses for your friend. I have merely suspended his three dimension existence temporarily."

"That fourth dimension stuff again," grunted Tony in relief, "then you can restore him to normal existence?"

“At any time within about one hour,” stated Talbot, “but he’ll have to behave himself if I do.” Tony shook his head in complete mystification. “I can not comprehend it at all. Yet, in view of what we have witness I can not refuse to believe,” he said.

Ainsworth pattered about the horizontal viewing screen as though nothing unusual had occurred. Margaret listened in amazement to the brief explanation given to Tony by Talbot:

“The fourth dimension, as I mentioned before, is something quite different from the popular conception of it. Ours is a many dimensional universe as has long been shown by mathematics, the first four dimensions being essential to the existence of a visible body.

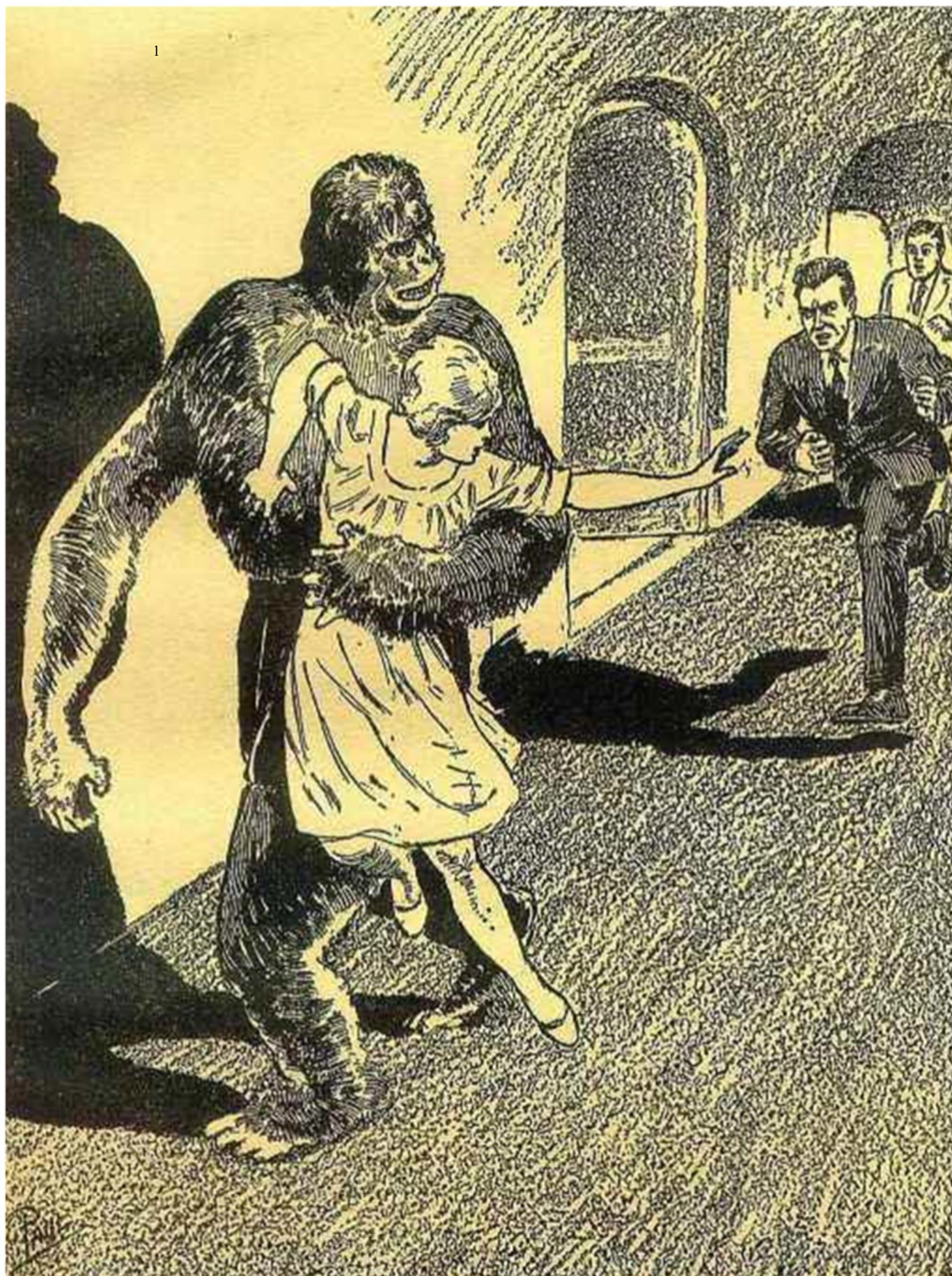
“Suppose there could exist a two-dimensional world. We might represent it by a sheet of paper having only length and breadth, which is of course impossible. But suppose it did exist and that a circle marked on such a sheet represented a room. A two-dimensional being on the sheet could not enter the room since he could move only on the surface and could not pass the outline of the ring which would, to him, represent the wall of the room. However, you or I could pick up this being and place him within the circle since we live in a world of more than two dimensions and can normally move in the first three.

“Substitute our commonly known three dimensions. A room has three perceptible dimensions and, if there are no openings through which a body may pass, it can not ordinarily be entered. But we can do so by means of the fourth dimension, which we may designate as duration of existence. In our many-dimensional world a body must have a definite duration of existence, in addition to length, breadth and thickness, else it is not existent to our perceptions. Your friend is now in that condition — to us he does not exist, since he has been rotated entirely outside the perceptible three dimensions and exists only in the fourth which to us is unperceivable. Do you follow me?”

“No,” admitted Tony frankly, “but I do get a glimmering of the nature of this fourth dimension, even though I do not understand how you control it. This then was the means used in removing the subway trains from the tunnel?”

“Yes. Of course, far more powerful apparatus was required but we merely provided for an interruption of the existence of the tube bottom for a sufficient period of time to allow of lowering the trains into the cavity beneath the tube.”

“And Van Alstyne?” whispered Tony so as not to be overheard by Margaret, who had returned to the viewing screen where Ainsworth still remained.



“The same thing,” said Talbot, “excepting the energy was used only on the heart of the old rascal. It was rotated entirely out of the first three dimensions permanently. Were an autopsy performed it would have been impossible to find the organ, since its duration of existence had been definitely discontinued. Later we used the energy on the entire body and removed it to one of our laboratories in its relatively non-existent state.”

“He has been restored then?” asked Tony hopefully.

“Not to life. That would be impossible, with the heart non-existent for so long a period. But his body was restored to the condition in which you found it in Cartersville. It now lies on one of our dissecting tables.”

Tony shuddered but, horrible as was this coldblooded disregard of human life, he could not help but admire the scientific achievements of this man.

“Watch,” continued Talbot, “we’ll restore Charlie.”

He stepped to a wall switch and made a quick adjustment. The normal lighting of the room dimmed and, in its stead there came a penetrating orange glow that filled the room with throbbing pulsations. The jarring thump followed — the sensation of wrenched physical support — then Charlie stood before them, somewhat dazed yet quite unharmed.

“Why — why,” stammered Charlie, “I heard every word of your conversation, yet I could not touch you. I could see through you as if you were all made of glass; through the walls; through the crust of earth above and into the depths of the heavens. It was the most remarkable experience I have ever gone through. But I seemed to be weakening rapidly.”

Margaret had looked up from the screen, startled by the orange glow and the events succeeding its appearance. Now she recovered and pointed to the screen in great excitement.

“Watch this,” she cried, “all are not dead in the cavern.”

The three men rushed to the viewing screen and there saw the destruction which had been wreaked by the explosive touched off by the arch-fiend, Ainsworth. The cavern was lighted by new flood lights that had been brought into play by reinforcements who evidently arrived after the blast. The interior of the cavern was a mass of wreckage and many of the first detachment of soldiers had been blown to bits. The cars of the three trains lay in torn and twisted heaps on the underground siding. The opening from the tunnel above was considerably enlarged. Many of the victims were still alive however, some mutilated and torn but others apparently very little the worse for their experience.

The newcomers assisted those they found alive to the new rope ladders they had let down and one by one the survivors were helped to the outside. Finally Charlie let forth a cry of joy.

“There’s Ward,” he shouted “he’s alive!”

It was true, for one of the rescuers dragged from a heap of bodies. The bedraggled form of a man in civilian clothes. He was bloody and grimy but was able to stand on his feet when raised to an upright position. Charlie gurgled his glee when his partner turned his face into plain view of the watchers and then hobbled unaided to the nearest ladder.

Ainsworth growled his dissatisfaction. “We only got about half of them,” he complained.

Even Talbot looked at him with disgust. “That’s plenty,” he snapped, “the lesson was the main thing we wanted to get across. And I imagine they’ve had enough for some time. Glad your friend escaped,” he concluded, turning to Charlie.

They Talk It Over

THEY left the presence of Ainsworth who unmindful of their conversation, had returned to his contemplation of the viewing screen. Talbot led them through the spacious halls of the palatial building and assigned living quarters to each of the three. It appeared that they were to be comfortable at least and Talbot displayed every solicitation for their welfare. He was a strange anomaly, this master of the underground realm in which they had so unexpectedly become, residents. His hatred of mankind in general contrasted vividly with his suavity of manner and his kindness to his captives.

He left them to their own devices with the parting information that he would return in an hour and conduct — them to their first meal in Subterranea, which was to be served within that time.

Tony busied himself removing the grime he had accumulated on hands and face during the preceding experiences. As he passed the connecting door between his own and Margaret’s apartments he thought he heard a choking sound from the other side of the partition. He paused and listened closely. Yes, there it was, a stifled sobbing that recurred at frequent intervals and wrung the heart of the listener. He berated himself for not having shown the girl more sympathy in her bereavement and in the predicament in which she now found herself. He and Charlie had much to interest them and to make life bearable in this unbelievable realm into which they had so unexpectedly plunged. But the girl, recently the witness of her father’s violent death and the disappearance of his body, had

every reason to long for her own accustomed surroundings and to get away from the terrible underground world. She had also the fate of her brother to cause grave concern, not to speak of the loss of the companionship of her own friends and relatives in the hour of trouble. And Tony had given his word that . no attempt should be made to return her to the upper world.

Soon the sobs ended and he could hear the girl stirring about in her rooms, so he completed his own ablutions and stepped to Charlie's rooms to join his friend. Charlie grinned sourly at his appearance.

"A fine mess we let ourselves in for," was his greeting.

"Looks that way," agreed Tony, "for myself I do not care so much, but this is going to be mighty hard on Miss Van Alstyne."

"Sure is," said Charlie, "and I don't see how in the devil we are ever going to get out of here. Wonder what they are doing with the rest of the gang they kidnapped."

"So do I. Though I fear there is not much mystery about that. Undoubtedly they are to become the subjects of some of the blood-curdling experiments of the demented Ainsworth."

"What on earth do these experiments consist of, do you suppose?"

"Why there was never any direct proof that Ainsworth had tortured animals needlessly in his reconstruction work, but enough evidence was obtained to enable the authorities to revoke his license to practice medicine and surgery. You'll remember that Talbot, who had been assisting the professor, always maintained stoutly that the work was entirely painless and that much good to mankind and to the subjects of experiment would result."

"I have often wondered how Talbot became interested in that sort of thing. He was a physicist and an experimenter along the lines of atomic science, high frequency vibrations and the like. What connection can there be?"

"It must be that the discoveries of Talbot led into the field of knifeless surgery," replied Tony, "you know there has been some surgical work accomplished by the use of penetrating rays, but this was never developed to any great extent as far as I know. It is quite possible that here is where Talbot fits into the thing."

"That's right," mused Charlie, "and we must admit that he has done some wonderful things here. This fourth dimension business is positively uncanny."

A Beast At Large

AT this moment their ears were assailed by a terrified scream from the corridor and both men rushed to the door, stumbling over each other in their eagerness to reach it. When they burst from the room and stared down the long hall, they were horrified to see Margaret Van Alstyne struggling with a naked giant who had picked her from the floor as if she were a child, and was carrying her away, unmindful of her kicking and squirming.

This huge man, for human he was, stood no less than seven feet in height and his body was matted with hair, yet showing extreme whiteness of skin in the uncovered portions. When the giant saw them, he dropped the frantically struggling girl and turned to face the new enemies. He tossed his great head to throw back from his eyes the long brown hair with which it was crowned. His lips writhed, revealing a gleaming set of strong, perfectly-formed teeth in a sneering grimace. Bushy brows surmounted the most remarkable pair of blue eyes imaginable but in those eyes there was something that sent a chill of fear through the visitors. It was not exactly the ferociousness of the glare that came from their depths, but rather a mysterious, unfathomable mystery that was somehow inhuman.

Seeing that the two men were regarding him with indecision, the brute again reached for the girl and she drew back in alarm. Tony cried out his rage as the hairy paws laid themselves on the shoulders of the trembling girl. With a rush that reminded Charlie of the old football days he was upon the monster. He sprang high in the air and landed on the giant's back, wrapping his legs about the middle of his body and twisting his arms around the thick neck in a strangling hold. But he was no match for this brute who spoke not a word but, with a quick wrench of his steel-muscled body, broke. Tony's hold and flung him to the floor. Tony, on his feet in a flash, sprang again, only to meet the great hairy paws of the monster, which now grasped him and twisted his body into a position that spelled certain breakage of the spine if the pressure was increased. Charlie jumped in to assist his friend and Margaret screamed again and again.

"Crom!" snapped the voice of Jerry Talbot, from only a few feet distant. He had approached unnoticed by the contestants and now faced the brute with a smile of contempt on his cruelly handsome face. "Drop him, Crom!" he ordered.

Tony was released and he dropped to the floor in an ignominious heap. His huge assailant dropped his eyes before the glare of the master and, with an infantile whimper that seemed ludicrous when issuing from so bulky an individual, he wheeled about and made off down the hall with shuffling swiftness, occasionally turning his head to see if Jerry was pursuing him. Then he sidled through an open door and was gone.

Jerry laughed. “Nearly came a cropper, didn’t you?” he said.

“I’ll say so!” exclaimed Tony, who had risen to his feet and was assisting Margaret to hers, “who in the name of time was that?”

“Oh, that is only Crom,” replied Talbot carelessly, “one of our experiments, you know.”

Charlie glared at their captor impotently while Margaret sobbed in hysterical relief. Tony rubbed his bruises ruefully.

CHAPTER VIII – The Story of the Pithies

AINSWORTH presided over the table during the meal that followed. He glowered continually and spoke not a word to the captives that was not made absolutely necessary in the business of dining. His nervous twitchings and grimaces were a constant source of wonder and irritation to the visitors, though Talbot seemed not to notice these peculiarities. It was evident that the self-exiled professor was in a state of extreme mental strain.

Margaret toyed with her food at first but soon discovered that she was unusually hungry and that the strange viands were really delicious. Several varieties of fish there were and meats which Talbot explained were obtained from reptilian animals with which the underground realm abounded. There was no bread, but a mealy tuber, of considerable size and apparently roasted or baked, provided an excellent substitute. A tart jelly of glutinous consistency and of brilliant purple color served as a delicious spread and as a condiment as well. The visitors were much refreshed and heartened when the meal was finished.

Ainsworth, without so much as excusing himself, rose from the table and hobbled hurriedly from the room.

“He can’t keep away from the operating rooms,” laughed Talbot.

“What sort of experiment is he now engaged in, Jerry?” asked Tony, “and what is the motive in all of this work you have done here in Subterranea?”

“I’m not averse to answering all of your questions,” replied Talbot, handing cigars to the two men and lighting one himself, “since it will be impossible for you to betray us to the upper world. It is a rather long story but I might as well start at the beginning.

“When we first entered this realm, after being literally ostracised and practically forced to leave by our enemies above, we were astonished to find a near-human population. The natives, whom you have not as yet seen, are ape-men of the same general

characteristics as the *Pithecanthropus erectus* of about a half million years B. C. But they had progressed to a civilization approximating that of the third interglacial period or about 75,000 years B. C. when chipped stone instruments were first made and used. Pithies, Ainsworth called them, and the name has stuck. They have no language but are able to use a few guttural sounds and have a limited number of combinations of these with the two vowels 'o' and 'a' for the designation of similar objects. Thus they pronounce quite plainly O-lak-a, their name for this city.

"Our first experiments involved changing only the physical characteristics of these creatures by surgical and medical means. We thus produced some two thousand of the higher type you saw in the cavern. These we call Grimaldi for they are of about the same physical appearance as the race of that name which flourished on the surface some 25,000 years B. C. Later discoveries and experiments enabled us to produce creatures such as the one who attacked you in the corridor, truly supermen physically but, as yet, woefully lacking in brain power."

"Did the natives submit willingly to these experiments?" inquired Tony.

"Yes, though in fear and trembling at first. You see, when we brought our scientific paraphernalia, we performed some stunts for them which convinced them that we were gods and were endowed with powers they could not hope to overcome. The first subjects for our experiments were given up more or less as sacrifices to the new gods, but when the results of our work became evident we had no difficulty in obtaining all the material we wanted. The Grimaldi are so superior to the Pithies physically that, even with their dull intellect, they could not fail to see the advantage in being thus altered. And then the reconstruction process was painless, since all radical alterations were made with the subject completely anaesthetized. The later supermen, numbering only about five hundred so far, have not as yet been released so the Pithies and the Grimaldi do not know of their existence."

Talbot's Ambition

"BUT what is the purpose of all this?" asked Charlie testily.

Talbot raised his eyebrows at the tone of the inquirer's voice. "Why," he said coolly, "the main purpose is for the advancement of science. We are going to create a race of supermen, endow them with the best brains that can be obtained from the upper world and set them loose eventually to assist us in conquering and ruling the surface. It is a

rotten civilization above, as you must all admit, and Ainsworth and I intend to correct its faults and make of it a worth-while aggregation of peoples.”

His dark eyes gleamed with fanatical ambition as he spoke and Tony hesitated before propounding the next question.

“You mentioned endowing these creatures with brains from above,” he asked, “what does this mean?”

“It means that we are commencing a systematic kidnapping of residents of the upper world with the express intention of taking from the best of them their knowledge and reasoning power and giving it to these supermen we are creating.”

Charlie and Margaret stared aghast. Tony’s cheeks blanched. “And the victims?” he inquired, “what becomes of them when their — er — brains have been taken from them?”

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. “They remain physically unimpaired and will make good laborers. But they become morons — or lower. However, they could serve no higher purpose in their narrow, useless lives above. The knowledge they acquired on the surface will live on and become mightily useful in bringing about and sustaining the golden age that is to ensue.”

Margaret shivered. “I think it is terrible,” she said, “it is an outrage that should not be tolerated.” “Not to be tolerated?” repeated Talbot, with rising inflection, “why, my dear young lady, we are the tolerators. Who is there to gainsay us? Who to determine what we shall or shall not do? We are the masters of the world and will soon show our hand far more effectively than in the minor expedition that has already been made against your city of New York.”

“Then there are to be other kidnappings?” asked Tony.

“Yes indeed. We must obtain many subjects for the psycho-transference operations. Ten thousand of the supermen are to be equipped with brains — with reasoning power and intelligence to as high a degree as can be provided by the not overly well-endowed inhabitants of the United States. And the preliminary campaign of terror which will probably continue for the next seven or eight years will assist us materially by breaking down the morale of the peoples of the upper world and leaving them in a state of demoralization at the time we finally strike our decisive blow.”

“And must we remain in this awful place until you have conquered our world?” asked Margaret.

“Yes. I’ll do my best though to protect you three from my partner and to see that you return safely to your homes when the time comes. Ainsworth has already requested that I give you up to him for use in the psycho-transference experiments. Should our project fail you must always remain here. I see little likelihood of its failure, however.”

Margaret bit her lip and was silent. Charlie gritted his teeth in helpless rage while Tony regarded Talbot critically.

“Jerry,” he said, “this is an elaborate program you have outlined. Are you and Ainsworth the sole humans engaged in the undertaking?”

Talbot hesitated. “No,” he finally admitted, “there are about one hundred others, though they spend most of their time on the surface. These are radicals who have been banded together during our several visits to the surface and they maintain our contact with the upper world. They have a permanent encampment atop the mesa in Arizona where our long tunnel terminates. Their homes are visible only from the air and, since the locality is well off the regular lanes of air travel, there is little danger of their discovery. They are equipped with several large planes which are used in transporting our purchased materials from the points of manufacture to our tunnel entrance. All purchases are paid for in gold and are ordered in the name of a mythical mining company, so no suspicion has been aroused.”

Ainsworth entered the dining room at this juncture. He was obviously much excited and his clawlike hands trembled agitatedly as he spoke.

“Come, come, Jerry,” he babbled, “it is done — the first of the new men are ready. They are marvelous. We have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

He paced to and fro in his impatience, his crouching limp becoming more noticeable than ever. Talbot rose from his chair and followed his partner from the room.

“You people may as well join us,” he said over his shoulder, “you’ll see some confirmation of what I have just told you.”

The Human Experiments

THEY followed through one of the long corridors and into a white-walled room that reeked of ether. Ainsworth carefully opened the door to an adjoining room and the visitors followed their captors into a typical hospital ward where no less than fifty giant patients lay beneath their clean white sheets. One, in a far corner of the room, was sitting erect in his cot and staring about him in wonder, as if he was observing his surroundings for the first time. To him Ainsworth led the way at once.

“Gorth,” he addressed the blond giant, “how do you feel?”

In strange contrast to the first of the giants they had seen, the eyes of this Gorth were bright with intelligence. “Fine,” he replied, in perfect English, “excepting that I am weak and dizzy.” He raised a huge paw to his forehead in a wondering gesture. “I do not understand,” he continued, “my memory of past conditions is somewhat fogged, yet I have the feeling of having been raised from base savagery. Even the words I use are unfamiliar to my tongue, yet I can use them perfectly to express my thoughts. And my thoughts are of strange things — of a new world where all is different, where men live in great buildings and travel in strange conveyances.”

“Better lie down now, Gorth,” admonished Ainsworth, “you’ll not be well enough to get up for two or three days yet.”

He turned to Talbot in triumph, ignoring the visitors. “What did I tell you?” he exulted, rubbing those claw-like hands over one another in a frenzy of nervousness.

Talbot’s eyes shone with exultation. “It is a success,” he gloated, “we shall become masters of the world, you and I, even as we planned.”

He threw his arm over the skinny shoulders of his mad partner and the two gazed long and earnestly at their handiwork. The visitors exchanged glances of helpless wonder.

“Well, what do you think of it?” asked Talbot, turning to the visitors with a triumphant smile.

“It is a wonderful accomplishment,” commented Tony, speaking very slowly, “yet a criminal one. We can not approve of your work, Jerry.”

Talbot indulged in his characteristic shrug, making no reply.

There was a commotion in the adjoining ward. A masculine voice rose again and again in incoherent shouts and Talbot and his limping partner, rushed through the connecting doorway, closely followed by the three visitors.

The sight that met their eyes was similar to that in the first ward, with the exception that here the patients were humans who had been kidnaped in the attacks on the subway tunnel. The commotion was being raised by a bewildered little man who scampered about the room attired only in a regulation hospital night-shirt. When they entered the room he approached them timidly, the light of hopeless witlessness in his pale blue eyes. His voice lowered to a meaningless, confidential, babble and the visitors sickened “at the beseeching look that came from his puzzled, uncomprehending eyes. He fawned upon Ainsworth like a pleading dog and Margaret turned away from the sight with tears in her eyes.

This had been an intelligent man, a prosperous business man of middle age by his appearance. But now he was little more than a helpless animal, bereft of memory, speech and reasoning power. The work of the experimenters had been complete.

“My God !” Charlie burst forth, unable to contain himself longer, “you’re a pair of murderers! Worse than murderers! This is the foulest thing I have ever imagined of the most savage of savages. You — you — ”

He stammered in impotent rage. Talbot looked at him with an uncompromising smile of tolerance but Ainsworth snarled like a beast and sprang for his accuser, twisting his talons into the flesh of Charlie’s throat with bestial ferocity. Like a flash the surprised prisoner recovered and, with a quick uppercut, smote his mad attacker a terrific blow under the chin. Ainsworth loosened his hold with a groan and toppled to the floor in a senseless heap.

Quick as a flash there appeared in Talbot’s hand a small glass bulb which glowed with a sudden spiteful carmine. This time there was none of the crackling blue flame that had marked the ending of Charlie’s- previous outburst. There was merely a hum of throbbing intensity and Charlie’s, body stiffened to a rigidity like that induced when they were first captured. His body toppled to the floor like a log to lie beside the helpless figure of the unconscious Ainsworth.

“That’ll be about enough of Erazee’s activities,” said Talbot, replacing his weapon in a side pocket, “from now on he is to remain in close confinement or he’ll be killing Ainsworth. But my promise to you holds good — you’ll not be harmed — only you must return to your quarters now and remain there until I call for you.”

Tony opened his mouth to speak, his jaws working with fury. But Margaret slipped a trembling hand over his mouth.

“Come, dear,” she whispered in his ear, “don’t make things worse. I am depending on you to protect me, you know.” .

Tony subsided and he and Margaret walked quietly from the ward as Talbot bent over his fallen partner and attempted to revive him.

CHAPTER IX – A Realization of Power

THE corridors were long and so similar in appearance that Tony and Margaret soon lost themselves and were unable to locate their rooms. They attempted to retrace their steps and finally encountered an open door that they took for the entrance to the hospital wards they had just quitted. But this door led them into a sort of a library where

the most conspicuous object in sight was a large wall map which immediately revealed itself as a map . of the underground reaches of Subterranea. This map incorporated an outline of North America with the caverns and tunnels of the sub-surface realm superimposed in red ink on the familiar lines indicating coast and state boundaries. They lost themselves in contemplation of the truly vast extent of this unsuspected hidden land.

“See this,” said Tony, placing his finger on the point marking the location of the city of Chicago, “this is where we now are, according to what Talbot has told us. Here is the tunnel through which we came.”

He traced an almost straight line leading nearly due east to New York City. The main cavern as outlined on the map extended from Chicago on the north to a point slightly below Hattiesburg, Mississippi on the south. Its left boundary passed under Paducah, Kentucky and the extreme eastern limit was beneath Bristol, Tennessee. From a point almost below Jackson, Mississippi there extended a long red line that ended some fifty miles west of the Arizona-New Mexico border. There Was a. second large cavern under eastern United States, this one being about 450 miles long and 150 miles wide and lying mostly under the state of Virginia with its northern end crossing Maryland and extending into Pennsylvania and its southern end just reaching to the northern border of South Carolina. There were a number of red lines indicating: connecting tunnels between the two caverns and these were far from straight. They twisted . and wandered about, indicating that they were natural rather than artificial, passages. Three further caverns of slightly smaller size were mapped in eastern Canada and these were interconnected by many passages and smaller caverns of irregular outline.

“I see you lost your way,” came the ironic voice of Talbot from the open doorway, startling them into turning abruptly.

“Yes,” said Tony truthfully, “and we happened in here and have been greatly interested in this map.”

“Rather surprising, isn’t it?” asked Talbot, without anger.

“Indeed it is. Though you had told us of the size of Subterranea, we did not fully realize its true immensity. Why, this is a small world in itself.”

“Exactly,” agreed Talbot, “and it is going to play an important part in the future of the outside world. Would you two like to visit the quarters of the natives of Olaka now and see for yourselves how much has been done for them since Ainsworth and I took hold of things?”

“Oh, I think that would be very interesting,” said Margaret, glad to agree to anything that would relieve the monotony of existence as a prisoner.

They were soon on a broad, paved area that fronted the building and extended to the shore of the tideless lake which it faced. The cold light of the five suns illuminated their surroundings with considerable brilliancy and with somewhat the same alteration of the color of their flesh and clothing as would be experienced in the light of mercury vapor lamps. Their five-fold shadows as they strode across the pavement were source of considerable amusement to Margaret as was the unfamiliar color of her ordinarily creamy-white skin.

“I’m glad we don’t look like this always,” she volunteered.

“You will,” said Talbot, “whenever you are outside the main building. Our artificial lights inside are quite similar to the light of the sun, but all natural lighting in Subterranea is of the same nature as the five suns. There are practically no red rays in this light at all.”

They had reached a broad roadway that led between an orderly double row of the curious circular huts of the natives. None of the natives were in evidence on the street.

“Were these huts built by the natives themselves?” asked Tony in astonishment at the regularity and smoothness of their size and shape.

“Yes,” replied Talbot, “but only since our arrival here. When we came they lived in natural caves and passages branching off from the main caverns. But we taught them to build these huts and, since they can not originate an idea but only imitate, all of the huts are identical. You might think it peculiar that it should be necessary to provide any shelter whatever in Subterranea on account of the one great roof overhead. But it is very necessary. At the moment it is calm, but at times this realm is subject to quite as severe storms as those of the upper world. Electrical storms are not infrequent and these are terrifying in the extreme on account of the reverberations from the walls of the caverns.

These are caused by discharges similar to lightning that take place between oppositely charged metallic deposits in the floors and walls. These are usually accompanied by severe rainstorms as well, since the humid atmosphere is brought to the saturation point by sudden changes in temperature and precipitation results. High winds are also produced by the electrical phenomena and by changes in temperature that cause the air to flow from one part of the realm to another.”

Margaret glanced upward, startled at the sound of a strange whistling overhead. She gasped in astonishment at what she saw — a huge bat-like creature, with broad

flapping wings fully twenty feet from tip to tip, winging its way out over the still lake. The eerie whistle was produced by this strange creature.

“Look!” she exclaimed.

The two men followed her glance, Tony with as much surprise as she herself evinced. Talbot laughed merrily at their astonishment.

“That is a pterosaur,” he explained, “a species of flying lizard quite similar to those of the Mesozoic age on the surface. There are many other strange creatures of the same period still living their lives in this realm. We have even encountered plesiosaurs as large as fifty feet in length in the dense forests between the two great lakes. It is a wonderful country and I know you are going to like it — after you become acclimated, of course.”

The Home of the Pithies

TWO or three of the Pithies had appeared at some little distance down the street and these stood gaping at the humans in open-mouthed curiosity. When they approached, the creatures did not move but continued to stare at the intruders from small beady, black eyes. They were quite similar to the apes that Margaret had seen in the zoo back home, yet they were infinitely more human and of quite erect posture. Their bodies were hairy and the foreheads long and sloping. The jaws were somewhat protuberant, and the expressions of their faces vacant, yet nowise hostile. In stature they were about five feet tall and the arms were somewhat longer than those of a human, yet not as long relatively as those of the ape. Their chests were deep and almost bare of hair, revealing a skin that appeared under the cold light as a gleaming blueblack.

“The Jives of these Pithies,” explained Jerry, “are very simple. Their needs are few and these are supplied by the females, who leave the city once every sixteen hours to hunt and to gather fruits and vegetables that grow in natural profusion along the shore of the lake. They are extremely fleet of foot and can easily overtake and capture with their hands the smaller lizard-like creatures that form their main supply of meat. They also lie quietly on the shore of the lake or along the bank of a small stream and fish, their quick hands darting into the water with incredible swiftness and returning with flopping prizes in the form of fish that grow to a weight as great as fifteen pounds. The males are drones and are somewhat smaller than the females, who are the masters and rulers of their little families and clans.”

“Was this city in existence before you came?” asked Tony.

“There was quite a settlement inhabiting the caves just back, of this point. It was the largest settlement in the realm and we naturally located here. Then, when we had taught the Pithies to build their habitations, others came in great numbers and settled here to be near the strange new beings who could control life and death, who could make fire, and otherwise perform what were to them supernatural feats.”

They had turned a corner and now advanced along a still wider thoroughfare where the huts were larger and more ornate. An air of greater dignity pervaded this street and they soon observed several of the Grimaldi lounging about in close proximity to their homes. These were similar to the higher type of ape-men who had assisted in their capture and, while of no greater size than the Pithies, they were still more erect and had much finer shaped , heads and whiter skin. They were far less hairy and the sloping forehead and protruding chin was scarcely, in evidence at all. Their eyes too held considerable more of intelligence.

After visiting several more streets of the city, the visitors tired of the adventure and did not object when Talbot suggested that they return to the castle, as he called the main large building. He was in unusually good humor and offered to show them the details of the psycho-transference work in which he and Ainsworth were engaged.

Margaret shuddered. “I could not bear to witness an operation,” she objected.

“But these are entirely painless,” Jerry explained, “The whole thing is done bloodlessly and both subjects are sleeping peacefully during the process. They have no realization of what is occurring and are in no pain whatsoever, even after they awaken.”

“Oh, but I can’t bear to think of the poor humans who must give up their intelligence to these manufactured giants, and become morons like the one we saw in the second ward,” she begged.

“These people are nothing to you,” said Talbot, “They are not even your kind. Few of those who ride the subways are of the wealthy class who are your friends and associates. What difference does it make?”

Margaret was about to retort hotly and it was Tony’s turn to interfere. He nudged her with his elbow and she refrained from further objection.

The Operation

THEY followed their. Captor into the castle and emerged a few minutes later from the car of the lift which had carried them to a floor of the building where the constant whirl of high speed machines filled the air with pleasantly throbbing vibrations.

Into a spotlessly white laboratory they accompanied Talbot and he pointed out the many generators of the various energies used in the processes which achieved the horrible results they had already witnessed.

In an adjoining room there were twenty double operating tables and all of these were occupied. Margaret shivered with dread when she observed that the shroud-like coverings hid two figures on each table — one a giant and the other the figure of a man or woman from her own world. There was no sound save the faint whirl of the machines in the laboratory.

They approached the nearest of the operating tables and saw that the heads of the two subjects projected from beneath the covers and that on each head there was a metallic cap-like contrivance that fitted closely to the entire portion of the skull in which the brains were enclosed. The patients lay face down so that it was. Not nearly as terrifying a sight as Margaret had expected. But the thought of the sinister purpose behind these unholy experiments held her in a chill of fear and disgust.

To the cap-like contrivances, there were connected a number of cables and these led to individual switchboards on the adjoining wall. These switchboards were covered with multitudes of. Small mechanisms that clicked and purred and reminded one of the central board of an automatic telephone system.

“The process takes about two hours,” explained Jerry, “But in that time we are able to give our superman an education that would ordinarily require fifteen or twenty years to impart. You see, we have been able to develop the actual brain cells and convolutions of the Grimaldi along with the physical size and vigor of their bodies. Their brains are almost identical in construction with our own. But they are empty until we provide the knowledge from an outside source. It was discovered fully ten years ago that the nerve impulses of the human body are electrical. This was proved by means of the oscillograph. But it remained for Ainsworth and I to discover that all functionings of the cells comprising bones, tissue, nerves, blood and brain are likewise electrical or electro-chemical in nature. We learned how these functions can be controlled. We learned how to alter tissue, to promote the growth of the cells, to alter their nature completely and eventually how to transfer characteristics from one cell to another in a different location. That is how we are carrying the conscious and subconscious; mental equipment from the human to the synthetic superman.”

Margaret seemed about to swoon, so white and pallid had her features become. Tony bent over her in solicitation and was only diverted from his attention by the sudden appearance of Ainsworth who seemed to be in a state of great excitement.

“The supply plane is here,” he jabbered addressing Talbot as if he did not observe the presence of the visitors, “And Marron has a prisoner — a stowaway on the plane when they left the field on Long Island. He seems to be a desperate character — but we can use him. Come.”

Without reply Talbot followed. Margaret and Tony trailed along and were not requested to do otherwise. They returned to the paved yard before the castle and there saw a large airplane of the cabin type and capable of carrying a considerable load.

“Surely this large plane did not come through one of your tunnels?” asked Tony.

“No indeed,” replied Talbot, “It came only from the entrance of the long tunnel of which I spoke. Our allies on the outside have planes of conventional design and these are used in obtaining material from all over the country above. But the loads are transferred twice, first to the car that brings them through the tunnel, then to this plane which completes the journey.”

Two men of husky build were struggling alongside the plane with a third man whose clothing was torn to shreds and who fought and cursed with the fury of a madman.

“What have we here?” asked Talbot, when they neared the scene of the struggle.

“A stowaway, sir,” replied one of the men holding the prisoner, who subsided at once on hearing the new voice, “We found him when only a few miles out of New York on the way back and thought we had better bring him along. He might have seen and heard too much.”

“You did right, Marron,” approved Talbot, “Let’s get a look at him.”

The prisoner raised his blood-streaked face in surely defiance. But when his eyes rested on Margaret he cried aloud.

“Margaret!” he exclaimed.

“Bob I” She leaned on Tony’s arm and quaked in terror as she recognized in the battered man her brother, Bob Van Alstyne, the man whom Tony had seen on that seemingly long-ago night in Cartersville.

CHAPTER X – Rumbly of Insurrection

THE hours, the days that followed, were miserable ones to Margaret and increasingly hopeless ones for Tony. Charlie Frazee remained in confinement and

Margaret's brother was also penned up in some unknown part of the castle. To Margaret's tearful entreaties, Talbot replied that Bob was in no danger and would come to no harm at his hands. To their inquiries concerning Charlie, he replied in the same manner. But he was rarely seen by the two prisoners who, though they were permitted more liberty about the castle and the city than they had hoped for, found that the time dragged very heavily on their Lands.

Tony was religiously keeping his watch running and he marked off the days, those dragging stretches of twenty-four hours, on a note-book calendar he had been in the habit of carrying. When the days lengthened to a week and finally ten days had passed, he grew increasing fearful for Margaret's safety and his own. It seemed that Talbot was becoming more and more intolerant of their presence and, at the few times they saw him, he spoke to them in short, gruff monosyllables.

Then there came a night, or sleeping period, of horror when Margaret was awakened by terrible sounds of strife and- agony from the corridor and was so unnerved that she pounded on the connecting door for admittance to Tony's quarters. For more than an hour she shivered in the darkness with Tony's protecting arms encircling her horror-shaken body as they listened to the screaming and cursing and groaning that told of a fearful conflict between the supermen and the morons in the hall. The strident voice and curses of Talbot and the screeching rage of Ainsworth told of their difficulty in regaining the mastery of which they had boasted. They had created Frankenstein monsters.

Long after the noises had subsided Margaret lay in the arms of the strong man she had come to know and trust so implicitly in the few days since their first meeting. Silently they sat and silently there came to each a great yearning for the love of the other.

"Margaret," finally burst from Tony in a husky, faltering voice, "I love you. I have always loved you it seems. If we ever get out of this place I want you for my wife. Can you — could you ever feel the same way?"

"Oh, I do, Tony," she whispered, "I have loved you since that first terrible night back home. If we could only return there how happy we would be."

She sobbed anew and buried her head in his shoulder. It was with a feeling of great tenderness and exultation mixed with the hopeless fear that had come during the past few days that he kissed her tear-moistened lips for the first time.

Revolt!

THERE came still another day when Talbot spoke cheerfully to the captives at meal time. "Well," he said, "After that one insurrection things have been looking up considerably. But our raw material is entirely used up and we are planning an expedition against Chicago directly overhead. We need a couple of thousand new subjects." "You mean," asked Tony, "that all of those kidnapped from New York have become morons?" "All excepting those that Ainsworth did not consider fit to use and put' out of the way."

"He killed them?"

"If you must call it that. They were merely removed by the simple fourth-dimensional process." Margaret kept her eyes steadfastly on her plate but her food remained untasted after that. Tony lapsed into silence while Talbot held forth in the old optimistic and boastful vein. Ainsworth had not even appeared for this meal — evidently being too busily engaged in the preparations for the coming visitation of terror.

May I visit my brother?" Margaret finally ventured.

"Why, yes," agreed Talbot, "I guess so. We'll go to his cell directly the meal is finished."

He was indeed in good humor and Margaret brightened considerably at his ready acquiescence.

But, when they reached Bob Van Alstyne's prison cell and she peered through the bars at his gaunt, drawn face, she once more felt the unnameable fear of this dreadful realm and of its menace to her brother and herself. Talbot stood by, watching and listening with little concern.

"Oh, Bob," she said, "Why did you do it?"

He shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "I thought they'd accuse me of father's murder and I wanted to get away while I could. I went out to the airport and stowed away on the first large plane that left. I got into — this."

A confused murmur reached their ears as they talked. This swelled to the sound of shouting and of fighting, running humans. Talbot straightened to attention and drew one of the bulb-shaped weapons from his pocket. The screeching voice of Ainsworth reached them and Jerry drew them back into a recess adjoining Bob's cell.

"They're coming this way?" he whispered.

Then came the limping figure of Ainsworth running through the corridor with full speed in their direction. The angry voices of his pursuers could be heard not far behind.

“God, Talbot!” gasped the panting Ainsworth, when he reached them, “They’ve found the arms we took from the militia. Rifles, revolvers and automatics are in their hands.”

“Who? The morons?” asked Jerry.

“No — our supermen. And here they come! They’ve gone mad !”

He and Talbot drew back into the recess, with Margaret and Tony hidden behind them. When the first of the enraged giants came into view the weapons of the two scientists glowed into activity. There sprang forth two of the vicious, crackling blue flames and the very space about them groaned with the ensuing wrench. Four or five of the onrushing attackers vanished into thin air but there came from behind these the spiteful reports of a number of automatics. Ainsworth staggered and clutched at his skinny breast, bringing his hand away covered with blood. He choked and gurgled, then crumpled to the stone floor in a grotesque heap. Bullets and chips from the stone walls spattered all about them and Margaret cowered in Tony’s arms. But Talbot stood his ground and again and again his weapon spat forth the blue flame that sent numbers of the enemy into that nothingness from which there could be no return.

When all of the pursuers had been accounted for, Talbot knelt over the prostrate form of his partner.

“He’s dead,” he pronounced gloomily. Then, with an arrogant gesture, “But I’ll carry on. Our plans must not fail, and I, I alone, shall be master of the world !”

His eyes glittered with fanatical fire and Margaret dug her head still deeper into the protecting shoulder. Then Talbot was gone, speeding off in the direction from which the contestants had come.

In the ensuing silence a groan from the cell smote their ears as the despairing cry of a dying man. Margaret turned to the bars with a moan of foreboding.

“Bob! Bob!” she called piteously.

But Bob Van Alstyne was past aid or comfort. He lay on the floor of his cell, sprawled awkwardly in a pool of his own blood. A stray bullet had entered his prison and wounded him mortally.

“Guess I’m done for. Sis,” he faltered, “Never was any good anyway. And now you’ll have no more worries about me. Be better for you — for everybody. Tell — tell — ”

The message was never finished, for Bob Van Alstyne breathed his last on that final word. Margaret stared at Tony in an agony of tearless sorrow. Then she knelt on the

cold stone and bowed her head against the bars as closely to the body of her brother as possible.

Hope and Fear

TONY left her to her grief and tip-toed back to the scene of the recent struggle, where he picked up two automatic pistols where they had clattered to the floor when their recent possessors were “removed” by the strange weapons of the scientific exiles.

He likewise filled a pocket with loaded clips of cartridges with which the floor was strewn. Apparently the energy which made away with the living beings had not taken effect on the metallic weapons and ammunition, even as it had failed in the case of Van Alstyne’s silk pyjamas.

A feeling of courage permeated his being as he returned to the mourning girl. They were at least not defenceless now and, if things came to the worst* they could always end their own lives rather than submit to what might even be more unendurable than death.

Gently he disengaged Margaret’s hands from the iron bars they gripped so tightly. Gently he raised her to her feet and led her from the scene.

“Come dear,” he said, “We can do nothing here and we may be able to save ourselves if we leave.” Unresisting, she followed, evidently too dazed with grief to protest. With one arm about her waist and with a loaded automatic in his free hand, Tony proceeded cautiously through the passages until they reached the lift. He had learned to manipulate its controls and they soon emerged at their, own floor where all was in deep silence. He half carried the stumbling girl into his own quarters and tenderly assisted her to his own bed, where she lay prone with her head buried in a pillow. Then, with a pistol in hand, he took up his position at the door to await developments.

He had not long to wait, for there was the sound of a scuffle down the hall, then three shots in rapid succession and one of the supermen came staggering out of a doorway to fall in a heap on the floor only a few doors from Tony’s. Another followed, clasping a broad hand to his mid-section as he groped his way blindly from the room. With dragging steps and beseeching eyes he approached Tony.

Escape

THE magnificently-built creature was quite evidently on his last legs and a feeling of pity for this product of man’s cruel ingenuity surged through Tony. He recognized the superman as the first one who had recovered from the psycho-transference process, the

one addressed by Ainsworth as Gorth. “Are you hit, Gorth?” he asked solicitously. “Yes,” was the painful reply, “Right through the middle. And how my head pains! It seems it has always pained since I became two beings.”

“Two beings?” asked Tony, in surprise.

Gorth fell to his knees, then sat crouched against the wall rocking to and fro with arms about his stomach in a futile attempt to staunch the flow of blood and to relieve his pain.

“Yes,” he said, “Two beings. The real Gorth, who is a manufactured man — produced by those fiends, Ainsworth and Talbot, from a less fortunate creature. Then the other me, a poor captive from that great land which is now in the memory that never before existed. This other self has been so unhappy — there was a wife, two children — wonderful companions — in that far-away land where all was so bright. And now the pain — the pain of longing that never ceases to tear at this great breast — the pain in the head that can not be relieved — the faces that come to torture in the darkness. I go—gladly—”

Another victim of Talbot’s and Ainsworth’s ambition had paid the price and Tony stepped into his room and obtained a sheet with which he covered the form of Gorth where it had slipped to the floor in its final struggle.

Another victim of Talbot’s and Ainsworth’s ambition had paid the price and Tony stepped into his room and obtained a sheet with which he covered the form of Gorth where it had slipped to the floor in its final struggle.

He returned to Margaret, closing and bolting the door behind him. She had recovered her poise and was sitting on the edge of the bed, a sad smile on her pale face.

Tony was about to make some attempt to console the girl he had come to love so intensely when there was a faint rap at the door, then a quick, insistent pounding.

“It is I — Talbot,” came the voice of their captor, “Let me in!”

With pistol ready for any emergency Tony unbolted the door and Jerry Talbot literally fell into the room. He too was mortally wounded and Tony helped him to a large easy chair where he faced the two captives with something of sorrow in his dark eyes.

“Bring pen and ink — paper,” he ordered, with a hint of his former imperious manner.

Tony did as he requested, placing the writing materials at Talbot’s hand on the broad arm of the chair.

“Thanks,” continued Jerry, “I’m about to write my last orders. And they are entirely to save you two people whom I have so wronged — your friend Charlie as well. I’ll die a bit happier if I know that at least this much of my sin has been rectified. You can fly a plane?”

“Yes,” replied Tony eagerly.

“Ours is in front, and it handles exactly the same as any standard plane with the exception of the atomic motor which is controlled by a small lever you will find at the side of the stick. But first — here are the keys.”

He produced a bunch of keys which he handed to Tony, denoting the several that would be needed. He told them where to locate Charlie, how to reach the entrance of the long tunnel, how to operate the car that would carry them to the Arizona retreat, how to blow up the tunnel to forever close the entrance to Subterranea and seal the tomb of his blasted hopes with the monsters of his making. Then he swiftly penned an order to Marron, the leader of his band on the surface;

“This will see you safely through,” he said, handing the paper to Tony, “Now, be off, before it is too late. The supermen and the morons are locked up temporarily, but none of our doors are strong enough to hold them for long and without my control they’ll take things in their own hands. So make haste.”

There was a certain majesty in the bearing of this man who, so recently inflamed with dreams of empire, was now about to pay the supreme penalty for his misdeeds. Tony hesitated.

“Is there nothing we can do for you?” he asked. “Nothing. Leave me at once.”

His head drooped and he waved them weakly from the room. Somehow they pitied him ; a sense of loss came to them as they took their last look at the dejected figure of the dying man. They crept from the room and started for Charlie’s cell.

CHAPTER XI – All’s Well

WARD PLATT still nursed a broken leg sustained during the blast that wrecked the cavern beneath the subway tunnel. He was growing irritable from his confinement and sat grumpily before the screen of his television-radio with the plaster-encased limb propped up on a footstool. He watched disgustingly the mining operation pictured. On the screen and listened disdainfully to the voices of the workmen as they labored with pick and shovel.

“Mary,” he said, turning to his wife who sat reading only a few feet from him in their pleasant library, “This work the city is doing will get them nowhere. Our friends are irretrievably lost. This boring and digging has been going on for two weeks now and what have they found? Nothing. Charlie and the rest have been swallowed up in the depths of the earth. Hundreds of feet of rock have been penetrated in every direction from that cavern of disaster and there is no clue as to the whereabouts of the twelve hundred people who vanished.”

He shook his head mournfully and his wife raised solemn eyes from her book.

“You think they will never be found?” she murmured. This had been gone over by them hundreds of times before but they never seemed. To tire of discussing the’ mystery still in the minds of all of New York and of the rest of the world as well.

At that moment there was the flashing of a small light over the screen of the television instrument, indicating that a call for Platt’s number was being made. He leaned over and pressed a small switch that dimmed the screen and opened the circuit for the incoming call. There was a brief pause, a click, and the screen re-lit to picture before the astonished eyes of Ward and Mary Platt the smiling face of Charlie Frazee.

“Hello folks,” came his cheerful voice. And the two watchers paled as if they had seen a ghost.

“Why — why Charlie,” gasped Ward, “We thought you were dead. Where are you?”

“Out in Arizona-just leaving for home. You can send out word that we are safe, three of us.”

The smiling face of Tony Russell now entered the field of vision and with him was a beautiful blonde who Mary recognized as the missing Margaret Van Alstyne.

“And the others?” asked Ward.

“All dead — or worse,” replied Charlie solemnly, “But it is a long story and must wait until we get back. We’re coming by airplane at once.”

There was very little further conversation since the adventurers were extremely anxious to start for home. When their faces faded from view, Ward Platt sat back in his chair with a gesture of futility.

“Well, it’s beyond me,” he said, “But from what they hint it seems that the world is going to be startled by a well-nigh incredible story. In the meantime we can be thankful that these three are safe at least.”

“Oh yes,” smiled his wife, “A thousand times yes. And you too, my dear.”

And, far out over the desert lands of Arizona, there sped eastward a fast cabin plane that carried the three survivors homeward. Charlie sat with Marron, who was piloting the plane and glad to be getting away from his recent activities. Directly behind them were Tony and Margaret, hands intertwined as they gazed at the sun-lit countryside slipping away beneath them and spoke in whispers of the new life to come, when they would always be together in the land which was forever freed of the menace from below.