



# Phantoms of Reality

A COMPLETE NOVEL

D. D. C.



# Phantoms of Reality

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## CHAPTER I - Wall Street—or the Open Road?

WHEN I was some fifteen years old, I once made the remark, "Why, that's impossible."

The man to whom I spoke was a scientist. He replied gently, "My boy, when you are grown older and wiser you will realize that nothing is impossible."

Somehow, that statement stayed with me. In our swift-moving wonderful world I have seen it proven many times. They once thought it impossible to tell what lay across the broad, unknown Atlantic Ocean. They thought the vault of the heavens revolved around the earth. It was impossible for it to do anything else, because they could see it revolve. It was impossible, too, for anything to be alive and yet be so small that one might not see it. But the microscope proved the contrary. Or again, to talk beyond the normal range of the human voice was impossible, until the telephone came to show how simply and easily it might be done.

I never forgot that physician's remark. And it was repeated to me some ten years later by my friend, Captain Derek Mason, on that memorable June night of 1929.

My name is Charles Wilson. I was twenty-five that June of 1929. Although I had lived all of my adult life in New York City, I had no relatives there and few friends.

I HAD known Captain Mason for several years. Like myself, he seemed one who walked alone in life. He was an English gentleman, perhaps thirty years old. He had been stationed in

the Bermudas, I understood, though he seldom spoke of it.

I always felt that I had never seen so attractive a figure of a man as this Derek Mason. An English aristocrat, he was, straight and tall and dark, and rather rakish, with a military swagger. He affected a small, black mustache. A handsome, debonair fellow, with an easy grace of manner: a modern d'Artagnan. In an earlier, less civilized age, he

would have been expert with sword and stick, I could not doubt. A man who could capture the hearts of women with a look. He had always been to me a romantic figure, and a mystery that seemed to shroud him made him no less so.

A friendship had sprung up between Derek Mason and me, perhaps because we were such opposite types. I am an American, of medium height, and medium build. Ruddy, with sandy hair. Derek Mason was as meticulous of his clothes, his swagger uniforms, as the most perfect Beau Brummel. Not so myself. I am careless of dress and speech.

I had not seen Derek Mason for at least a month when, one June afternoon, a note came from him. I went to his apartment at eight o'clock the same evening. Even about his home there seemed a mystery. He lived alone with one man servant. He had taken quarters in a high-class bachelor apartment building near lower Fifth Avenue, at the edge of Greenwich Village.

All of which no doubt was rational enough, but in this building he had chosen the lower apartment at the ground-floor level. It adjoined the cellar. It was built for the janitor, but Derek had taken it and fixed it up in luxurious fashion. Near it, in a corner of the cellar, he had boarded off a square space into a room. I understood vaguely that it was a chemical laboratory. He had never discussed it, nor had I ever been shown inside it. Unusual, mysterious enough, and that a captain of the British military should be an experimental scientist was even more unusual. Yet I had always believed that for a year or two Derek had been engaged in some sort of chemical or physical experiment. With all his military swagger he had the precise, careful mode of thought characteristic of the man of scientific mind.

I RECALL that when I got his note with its few sentences bidding me come to see him, I had a premonition that it marked the beginning of something strange. As though

the portals of a mystery were opening to me! Nothing is impossible! Nevertheless I record these events into which I was plunged that June evening with a very natural reluctance. I expect no credibility. If this were the year 2000, my narrative doubtless would be tame enough. Yet in 1929 it can only be called a fantasy. Let it go at that. The fantasy of to-day is the sober truth of to-morrow. And by the day after, it is a mere platitude. Our world moves swiftly.

Derek received me in his living-room. He admitted me himself. He told me that his man servant was out. It was a small room, with leather-covered easy chairs, rugs on its hardwood floor, and sober brown portieres at its door and windows. A brown parchment shade shrouded the electrolier on the table. It was the only light in the room. It cast its mellow sheen upon Derek's lean graceful figure as he flung himself down and produced cigarettes. He said, "Charlie, I want a little talk with you. I've something to tell you—something to offer you." He held his lighter out to me, with its tiny blue alcohol flame under my cigarette. And I saw that his hand was trembling.

"BUT I don't understand what you mean," I protested.

He retorted, "I'm suggesting that you might be tired of being a clerk in a brokerage office. Tired of this humdrum world that we call civilization. Tired of Wall Street."

"I am, Derek. Heavens, that's true enough."

His eyes held me. He was smiling half whimsically: his voice was only half serious. Yet I could see, in the smoldering depths of those luminous dark eyes, a deadly seriousness that belied his smiling lips and his gay tone.

He interrupted me with, "And I offer you a chance for deeds of high adventuring. The romance of danger, of pitting your wits against villainy to make right triumph over wrong, and to win for yourself power and riches—and perhaps a fair lady. . . ."

"Derek, you talk like a swashbuckler of the middle ages."

I thought he would grin, but he turned suddenly solemn.

"I'm offering to make you henchman to a king, Charlie."

"King of what? Where?"

He spread his lean brown hands with a gesture. He shrugged. "What matter? If you seek adventure, you can find it—somewhere. If you feel the lure of romance—it will come to you."

I said, "Henchman to a king?"

But still he would not smile. "Yes. If I were king. I'm serious. Absolutely. In all this world there is no one who cares a damn about me. Not in this world, but. . . ."

He checked himself. He went on, "You are the same. You have no relatives?"

"No. None that ever think of me."

"No," I smiled. "Not yet. Maybe never."

"But you are too interested in Wall Street to leave it for the open road?" He was sarcastic now. "Or do you fear deeds of daring? Do you want to right a great wrong? Rescue an oppressed people, overturn the tyranny of an evil monarch, and put your friend and the girl he loves upon the throne? Or do you want to go down to work as usual in the subway tomorrow morning? Are you afraid that in this process of becoming henchman to a king you may perchance get killed?"

I matched his caustic tone. "Let's hear it, Derek."

## CHAPTER II - The Challenge of the Unknown

INCREDIBLE! Impossible! I did not say it, though my thoughts were written on my face, no doubt.

Derek said quietly, "Difficult to believe, Charlie? Yes! But it happens to be true. The girl I love is not of this world, but she lives nevertheless. I have seen her, talked with her. A slim little thing—beautiful. ..."

He sat staring. "This is nothing supernatural, Charlie. Only the ignorant savages of our past called the unknown—the unusual—supernatural. We know better now."

I said, "This girl—"

He gestured. "As I told you, I have for years been working on the theory that there is another world, existing here in this same space with us. The Fourth Dimension! Call it that if you like. I have found it, proved its existence! And this girl—her name is Hope—lives in it. Let me tell you about her and her people. Shall I?"

My heart was pounding so that it almost smothered me. "Yes, Derek."

"She lives here, in this Space we call New York City. She and her people use this same Space at the same time that we use it. A different world from ours, existing here now with us! Unseen by us. And we are unseen by them!

"A different form of matter, Charlie. As tangible to the people of the other realm as we are to our own world. Humans like ourselves."

He paused, but I could find no words to fill the gap. And presently he went on:

"Hope's world, co-existing here with us, is dependent upon us. They speak what we call English. They shadow us."

I murmured, "Phantoms of reality."

"Yes. A world very like ours. But primitive, where ours is civilized."

I was conjuring the face only from Derek's words, making real that which existed only in my imagination.

Yet I knew that in another realm, with my thoughts now bridging the gap, the girl was real. Would I go into the unknown?

The quest of the unknown. The gauntlet of the unknown flung down now before me, as it was flung down before the ancient explorers who picked up its challenge and mounted the swaying decks of their little galleons and said, "We'll go and see what lies off there in the unknown."

That same lure was on me now. I heard my voice saying, "Why yes, I guess I'll go, Derek."



## CHAPTER III - Into the Unknown

WE stood in the boarded room which was Derek's laboratory. Our preparations had been simple: Derek had made them all in advance. There was little left to do. The laboratory was a small room of board walls, board ceiling and floor. Windowless, with a single door opening into the cellar of the apartment house. Derek had locked the door after us as we entered. He said, "I have sent my man servant away for a week. The people in the house here think I have gone away on a vacation. No one will miss us, Charlie—not for a time, anyway."

No one would miss me, save my employers, and to them I would no doubt be small loss.

We had put out the light in Derek's apartment and locked it carefully after us. This journey! I own that I was trembling, and frightened. Yet a strange eagerness was on me.

The cellar room was comfortably furnished. Rugs were on its floor. Whatever apparatus of a research laboratory had been here was removed now. But the evidence of it remained—Derek's long search for this secret which now he was about to use. A row of board shelves at one side of the room showed where bottles and chemical apparatus had stood. A box of electrical tools and odds and ends of wire still lay discarded in a corner of the room. There was a tank of running water, and gas connections, where no doubt bunsen burners had been.

DEREK produced his apparatus. I sat on a small low couch against the wall and watched him as he stripped himself of his clothes. Around his waist he adjusted a wide, flat, wire-woven belt. A small box was fastened to it in the middle of the back—a wide, flat thing of metal, a quarter of an inch thick, and curved to fit his body. It was a storage battery of the vibratory current he was using. From the battery, tiny threads of wire ran up his back to a wire necklace flat against his throat. Other wires extended down his arms

to the wrists. Still others down his legs to the ankles. A flat electrode was connected to the top of his head like a helmet. I was reminded as he stood there, of medical charts of the human body with the arterial system outlined. But when he dressed again and put on his jaunty captain's uniform, only the electrode clamped to his head and the thin wires dangling from it in the back were visible to disclose that there was anything unusual about him.

He said smilingly, "Don't stare at me like that"

I took a grip on myself. This thing was frightening, now that I actually was embarked on it. Derek had explained to me briefly the workings of his apparatus. A vibratory electronic current, for which as yet he had no name, was stored in the small battery. He had said:

"There's nothing incomprehensible about this, Charlie. It's merely a changing of the vibration rate of the basic substance out of which our bodies are made. Vibration is the governing factor of all states of matter. In its essence what we call substance is wholly intangible. That is already proven. A vortex! A whirlpool of nothingness! It creates a pseudo-substance which is the only material in the universe. And from this, by vibration, is built the complicated structure of things as we see and feel them to be, all dependent upon vibration. Everything is altered, directly as the vibratory rate is changed. From the most tenuous gas, to fluids to solids—throughout all the different states of matter the only fundamental difference is the rate of vibration."

I UNDERSTOOD the basic principle of this that he was explaining—that now when this electronic current which he had captured and controlled was applied to our physical body, the vibration rate of every smallest and most minute particle of our physical being was altered. There is so little in the vast scale of natural phenomena of which our human senses are cognisant! Our eyes see the colors of the spectrum, from red

to violet. But a vast invisible world of color lies below the red of the rainbow! Physicists call it the infra-red. And beyond the violet, another realm—the ultra-violet. With sound it is the same. Our audible range of sound is very small. There are sounds with too slow a vibratory rate for us to hear, and others too rapid. The differing vibratory rate from most tenuous gas to most substantial solid is all that we can perceive in this physical world of ours. Yet of the whole, it is so very little! This other realm to which we were now going lay in the higher, more rapid vibratory scale.. To us, by comparison, a more tenuous world, a shadow realm.

I listened to Derek's words, but my mind was on the practicality of what lay ahead. An explorer, standing upon his ship, may watch his men bending the sails, raising the anchor, but his mind flings out to the journey's end. . . .

WE were soon ready. Derek wore his jaunty uniform, I wore my ordinary business suit. A magnetic field would be about us, so that in the transition anything in fairly close contact with our bodies was affected by the current.

Derek said, "I will go first, Charlie."

"But, Derek—" A fear, greater than the trembling I had felt before, leaped at me. Left here alone, with no one on whom to depend!

He spoke with careful casualness, but his eyes were burning me. "Just sit there, and watch. When I am gone, turn on the current as I showed you and come after me. I'll wait for you."

"Where?" I stammered.

He smiled faintly. "Here. Right here. I'm not going away! Not going to move. I'll be here on the couch waiting for you."

Terrifying words! He had lowered the couch, bending out its short legs until the frame of it rested on the board floor. He drew a chair up before it and seated me. He sat

down on the couch. He said, "Oh, one other thing. Just before you start, put out the light. We can't tell how long it will be before we return."

Terrifying words!

His right hand was on his left wrist where the tiny switch was placed. He smiled again. "Good luck to us, Charlie!"

Good luck to us! The open road, the unknown!

I sat there staring. He was partly in shadow. The room was very silent. Derek lay propped up on one elbow. His hand threw the tiny switch.

There was a breathless moment. Derek's face was set and white, but no whiter than my own, I was sure. His eyes were fixed on me. I saw him suddenly quiver and twitch a little.

I murmured, "Derek—"

At once he spoke, to reassure me. "I'm all right, Charlie. That was just the first feel of it."

THERE was a faint quivering throb in the room, like a tiny distant dynamo throbbing. The current was surging over Derek; his legs twitched.

A moment. The faint throbbing intensified. No louder, but rapid, infinitely more rapid. A tiny throb, an aerial whine, faint as the whirring wings of a humming bird. It went up the scale, ascending in pitch, until presently it was screaming with an aerial microscopic voice.

But there seemed no change in Derek. His uniform was glowing a trifle, that was all. His face was composed now; he smiled, but did not speak. His eyes roved away from me, as though now he were seeing things that I could not see.

Another moment. No change.

Why, what was this? I blinked, gasped. There was a change! My gaze was fastened upon Derek's white face. White? It was more than white now! A silver sheen seemed to be coming to his skin!

I think no more than a minute had passed. His face was glowing, shimmering. A transparent look was coming to it, a thinness, a sudden unsubstantiality! He dropped his elbow and lay on the couch, stretched at full length at my feet. His eyes were staring.

And suddenly I realized that the face that held those staring eyes was erased! A shimmering apparition of Derek was stretched here before me. I could see through it now! Beneath the shimmering, blurred outlines of his body I could see the solid folds of the couch cover. A ghost of Derek here. An apparition—fading—dissipating!

A gossamer outlined of him, imponderable, intangible.

I leaped to my feet, staring down over him.

"Derek!"

The shape of him did not move. Every instant it was more vaporous, more unreal.

I thought, "He's gone!"

No! He was still there. A white mist of his form on the couch. Melting, dissipating in the light like a fog before sunshine. A wisp of it left, like a breath, and then there was nothing.

I SAT on the couch. I had put out the light. Around me the room was black. My fingers found the small switch at my wrist. I pressed it across its tiny arc.

The first shock was slight, but infinitely strange. A shuddering, twitching sensation ran all over me. It made my head reel, swept a wave of nausea over me, a giddiness, a feeling that I was falling through darkness. I lay on the couch, bracing myself. The current was whining up its tiny scale. I could feel it now. A tiny throbbing, communicating itself to my physical being.

And then in a moment I realized that my body was throbbing. The vibration of the current was communicating itself to the most minute cells of my body. An indescribable tiny quivering within me. Strange, frightening, sickening at first. But the sickness passed, and in a moment I found it almost pleasant.

I could see nothing. The room was wholly dark. I lay on my side on the couch, my eyes staring into the blackness around me. I could hear the humming of the current, and then it seemed to fade. Abruptly I felt a sense of lightness. My body, lying on the couch, pressed less heavily.

I gripped my arm. I was solid, substantial as before. I touched the couch. It was the couch which was changing, not I! The couch cover queerly seemed to melt under my hand!

The sense of my own lightness grew upon me. A lightness, a freedom, pressed me, as though chains and shackles which all my life had encompassed me were falling away. A wild, queer freedom.

I wondered where Derek was. Had I arrived in the other realm? Was he here? I had no idea how much time had passed: a minute or two, perhaps.

Or was I still in Derek's laboratory? The darkness was as solid, impenetrable as ever. No, not quite dark! I saw something now. A glowing, misty outline around me. Then I saw that it was not the new, unknown realm, but still Derek's room. A shadowy, spectral room, and the light, which dimly illumined it, was from outside.

I LAY puzzling, my own situation forgotten for the moment. The light came from overhead, in another room of the apartment house. I stared. Around me now was a dim vista of distance, and vague, blurred, misty outlines of the apartment building above me. The shadowy world I had left now lay bare. There was a moment when I thought I could

see far away across a spectral city street. The shadows of the great city were around me. They glowed, and then were gone.

A hand gripped my arm in a solid grip. Derek's voice sounded.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes," I murmured. The couch had faded. I was conscious that I had floated or drifted down a few inches, to a new level. The level of the cellar floor beneath the couch. Cellar floor! It was not that now. Yet there was something solid here, a solid ground, and I was lying upon it, with Derek sitting beside me.

I murmured again, "Yes, I'm all right."

My groping hand felt the ground. It was soil, with a growth of vegetation like a grass sward on it. Were we outdoors? It suddenly seemed so. I could feel soft, warm air on my face and had a sense of open distance around me. A light was growing, a vague, diffused light, as though day were swiftly coming upon us.

I felt Derek fumbling at my wrist. "That's all, Charlie."

There was a slight shock. Derek was pulling me up beside him. I found myself on my feet, with light around me. I stood wavering, gripping Derek. It was as though I had closed my eyes, and now they were suddenly open. I was aware of daylight, color, and movement. A world of normality here, normal to me now because I was part of it. The realm of the unknown!

## CHAPTER IV - "Hope, I Came. . . ."

I THINK I was first conscious of a queer calmness which had settled upon me, as though now I had withdrawn contact with the turmoil of our world. Something was gone, and in its place came a calmness. But that was a mere transition. It had passed in a moment. I stood trembling with eagerness, as I know Derek was trembling.

A radiant effulgence of light was around us, clarifying, growing. There was ground beneath our feet, and sky overhead. A rational landscape, strangely familiar. A physical world like my own, but, it seemed, with a new glory "upon it. Nature, calmly serene. I had thought we were standing in daylight. I saw now it was bright starlight. An evening, such as the evening we had just left in our own world. The starlight showed everything clearly. I could see a fair distance.

We stood at the top of a slight rise. I saw gentle, slightly undulating country. A brook nearby wound through a grove of trees and lost itself. Suddenly, with a shock, I realized how familiar this was! We stood facing what in New York City we call West. The contour of this land was familiar enough for me to identify it. A mile or so ahead lay a river; it shimmered in its valley, with cliffs on its further side. Near at hand the open country was dotted with trees and checkered with round patches of cultivated fields. And there were occasional habitations, low, oval houses of green thatch.

The faint flush of a recent sunset lay upon the landscape, mingled with the starlight. A road—a white ribbon in the starlight—wound over the countryside toward the river. Animals, strange of aspect, were slowly dragging carts. There were distant figures working in the fields.

A city lay ahead of us, set along this nearer bank of the river. A city! It seemed a primitive village. All was primitive, as though here might be some lost Indian tribe of our



early ages. The people were picturesque, the field workers garbed in vivid colors. The flat little carts, slow moving, with broad-horned oxen.

THIS quiet village, drowsing beside the calm-flowing river, seemed all very normal. I could fancy that it was just after sundown of a quiet workday. There was a faint flush of pink upon everything: the glory of the sun just set. And as though to further my fancy, in the village by the river, like an angelus, a faint-toned bell was chiming.

We stood for a moment gazing silently. I felt wholly normal. A warm, pleasant wind fanned my hot face. The sense of lightness was gone. This was normality to me.

Derek murmured, "Hope was to meet me here."

And then we both saw her. She was coming toward us along the road. A slight, girlish figure, clothed in queerly vivid garments: a short jacket of blue cloth with wide-flowing sleeves, knee-length pantaloons of red, with tassels dangling from them, and a wide red sash about her waist. Pale golden hair was piled in a coil upon her head.

She was coming toward us along the edge of the road, from the direction of the city. She was only a few hundred feet from us when we first saw her, coming swiftly, furtively it seemed. A low pike fence bordered the road. She seemed to be shielding herself in the shadows beside it.

We stood waiting in the starlight. The nearest figures in the field and on the road were too far away to notice us. The girl advanced. Her white arm went up in a gesture, and Derek answered. She left the road, crossing the field toward us. As she came closer, I saw how very beautiful she was. A girl of eighteen, perhaps, a fantastic little figure with her vivid garments. The starlight illumined her white face, anxious, apprehensive, but eager.

"Derek!"

He said, "Hope, I came. ..."

I stood silently watching. Derek's arms went out, and the girl, with a little cry, came running forward and threw herself into them.

## CHAPTER V - Intrigue

"AM I in time, Hope?" "Yes, but the festival is to-night. In an hour or two now. Oh Derek, if the king holds this festival, the toilers will revolt. They won't stand it—"

"To-night! It mustn't be held to-night! It doesn't give me time, time to plan."

I stood listening to their vehement, half-whispered words. For a moment or two, absorbed, they ignored me.

"The king will make his choice to-night, Derek. He has announced it. Blanca or Sensua for his queen. And if he chooses the Crimson Sensua—" She stammered, then she went on:

"If he does—there will be bloodshed. The toilers are waiting, just to learn his choice."

Derek exclaimed, "But to-night is too soon! I've got to plan. Hope, where does Rohbar stand in this?"

Strange intrigue! I pieced it together now, from their words, and from what presently they briefly told me. A festival was about to be held, an orgy of feasting and merrymaking, of music and dancing. And during it, this young King Leonto was to choose his queen. There were two possibilities. The Crimson Sensua, a profligate, debauched woman who, as queen, would further oppress the workers. And Blanca, a white beauty, risen from the toilers to be a favorite at the Court. Hope was her handmaiden.

If Blanca were chosen, the toilers would be appeased. She was one of them. She would lead this king from his profligate ways, would win from him justice for the workers.

But Derek and Hope both knew that the pure and gentle Blanca would never be the king's choice. And to-night the toilers would definitely know it, and the smoldering revolt would burst into flame.

AND there was this Rohbar. Derek said, "He is the king's henchman, Charlie."

I stood here in the starlight, listening to them. This strange primitive realm. There were no modern weapons here. We had brought none. The current used in our transition would have exploded the cartridges of a revolver. I had a dirk which Hope now gave me, and that was all.

Primitive intrigue. I envisaged this chaotic nation, with its toilers ignorant as the oppressed Mexican peons at their worst. Striving to better themselves, yet, not knowing how. Ready to shout for any leader who might with vainglorious words set himself up as a patriot.

This Rohbar, perhaps, was planning to do just that.

And so was Derek! He said, "Hope, if you could persuade the king to postpone the festival—if Blanca would help persuade him—just until to-morrow night. ..."

"I can try, Derek. But the festival is planned for an hour or two from now."

"Where is the king?"

"In his palace, near the festival gardens."

She gestured to the south. My mind went back to New York City. This hillock, where we were standing in the starlight beside a tree, was in my world about Fifth Avenue and Sixteenth Street. The king's palace—the festival gardens—stood down at the Battery, where the rivers met in the broad water of the harbor.

DEREK was saying, "We haven't much time: can you get us to the palace?"

"Yes. I have a cart down there on the road."

"And the cloaks for Charlie and me?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Derek. "We'll go with you. It's a long chance; he probably won't postpone it. If he does not, we'll be among the audience. And when he chooses the Red Sensua—"

She shuddered, "Oh, Derek—" And I thought I heard her whisper, "Oh, Alexandre—" and I saw his finger go to his lips.

His arm went around her. She huddled, small as a child against his tall, muscular body.

He said gently, "Don't be afraid, little Hope."

His face was grim, his eyes were gleaming. I saw him suddenly as an instinctive military adventurer. An anachronism in our modern New York City. Born in a wrong age. But here in this primitive realm he was at home.

I plucked at him. "How can you—how can we dare plunge into this thing? Hidden with cloaks, yes. But you talk of leading these toilers."

He cast Hope away and confronted me. "I can do it! You'll see, Charlie." He was very strangely smiling. "You'll see. But I don't want to come into the open right away. Not to-night. But if we can only postpone this accursed festival."

We had been talking perhaps five minutes. We were ready now to start away. Derek said:

"Whatever comes, Charlie, I want you to take care of Hope. Guard her for me, will you?"

I said, "Yes, I will try to."

Hope smiled as she held out her hand to me. "I will not be afraid, with Derek's friend."

HER English was of different intonation from our own, but it was her native language, I could not doubt.

I took her cold, slightly trembling hand. "Thank you, Hope."

Her eyes were misty with starlight. Tender eyes, but the tenderness was not for me.

"Yes," I repeated. "You can depend upon me, Derek."

We left the hillock. A food-laden cart came along the road. The driver, a boy vivid in jacket and wide trousers of red and blue, bravely worn but tattered, ran alongside guiding the oxen. When they had passed we followed, and presently we came to the cloaks Hope had hidden. Derek and I donned them. They were long crimson cloaks with hoods.

Hope said, "Many are gathering for the festival shrouded like that. You will not be noticed now."

Further along the road we reached a little eminence. I saw the river ahead of us, and a river behind us. And a few miles to the south, an open spread of water where the rivers joined. Familiar contours! The Hudson River! The East River. And down at the end of the island, New York Harbor.

Hope gestured that way. "The king's palace is there."

We were soon passing occasional houses, primitive thatched dwellings. I saw inside one. Workers, were seated over their frugal evening meal. Always the same vivid garments, jaunty but tattered. We passed one old fellow in a Held, working late in the starlight. A man bent with age, but still a tiller of the soil. Hope waved to him and he responded, but the look he gave us as we hurried by shrouded in our crimson cloaks was sullenly hostile.

We came to an open cart. It stood by the roadside. An ox with shaggy coat and spreading horns was fastened to the fence. It was a small cart with small rollers like wheels. Seats were in it and a vivid canopy over it. We climbed in and rumbled away.

AND this starlit road in our own world was Broadway! We were presently passing close to the river's edge. This quiet, peaceful, starlit river! Why, in our world it was massed with docks! Great ocean liners, huge funneled, with storied decks lay here! Under this river, tunnels with endless passing vehicles! Tubes, with speeding trains crowded with people! The reality here was so different! Behind us what seemed an upper city was strung along the river. Ahead of us also there were streets and houses, the city of the workers. A bell was toiling. Along all the roads now we could see the moving yellow spots of lights on the holiday carts headed for the festival. And there were spots of yellow torchlight from boats on the river.

We soon were entering the city streets. Narrow dirt streets they were, with primitive shacks to the sides. Women came to the doorways to stare at our little cart rumbling hastily past. I was conscious of my crimson cloak, and conscious of the sullen glances of hate which were flung at it from every side, here in this squalid, forlorn section where the workers lived.

Along every street now the carts were passing, converging to the south. They were filled, most of them, with young men and girls, all in gaudy, costumes. Some of them, like ourselves, were shrouded in crimson cloaks. The carts occasionally were piled with flowers. As one larger than us, and moving faster rumbled by, a girl in it stood up and pelted me with blossoms. She wore a crimson robe, but it had fallen from her shoulders. I caught a glimpse of her face, framed in flowing dark hair, and of eyes with laughter in them, mocking me, alluring.

We came at last to the end of the island. There seemed to be a thousand or more people arriving, or here already. The tip of the island had an esplanade with a broad canopy behind it. Burning torches of wood gave flames of yellow, red and blue fire. A throng of gay young people promenaded the walk, watching the arriving boats.

AND here, behind the walk at the water's edge, was a garden of trees and lawn, shrubs and beds of tall vivid flowers. Nooks were here to shelter lovers, pools of water glinted red and green with the reflected torchlight. In one of the pools I saw a group of girls bathing, sportive as dolphins.

To one side at a little distance up the river, banked against the water, was a broad, low building: the palace of the king. About it were broad gardens, with shrubs and flowers. The whole was surrounded by a high metal fence, spiked on top.

The main gate was near at hand; we left our cart. Close to the gate was a guard standing alert, a jaunty fellow in leather pantaloons and leather jacket, with a spiked helmet, and in his hand a huge, sharp-pointed lance. The gardens of the palace, what we could see of them, seemed empty—none but the favored few might enter here. But as I climbed from the cart, I got the impression that just inside the fence a figure was lurking. It started away as we approached the gate. The guard had not seen it—the drab figure of a man in what seemed to be dripping garments, as though perhaps he had swum in from the water.

And Derek saw him. He muttered, "They are everywhere."

Hope led us to the gate. The guard recognized her. At her imperious gesture he stood aside. We passed within. I saw the palace now as a long winged structure of timber and stone, with a high tower at the end of one wing. The building fronted the river, but here on the garden side there was a broad doorway up an incline, twenty feet up and over a small bridge, spanning what seemed a dry moat. Beyond, it a small platform, then an oval archway, the main entrance to the building.

Derek and I, shrouded in our crimson cloaks with hoods covering us to the eyes, followed Hope into the palace.



## CHAPTER VI - The King's Henchman

THE long room was bathed in colored lights. There was an ornate tiled floor. Barbaric draperies of heavy fabric shrouded the archways and windows. It was a totally barbaric apartment. It might have been the audience chamber of some fabled Eastern Prince of our early ages. Yet not quite that either. There was a primitive modernity here. I could not define it, could not tell why I felt this strangeness. Perhaps it was the aspect of the people. The room was crowded with men and gay laughing girls in fancy dress costumes. Half of them at least were shrouded in crimson cloaks, but most of the hoods were back. They moved about, laughing and talking, evidently waiting for the time to come for them to go to the festival. We pushed our way through them.

Derek murmured, "Keep your hood up, Charlie."

A girl plucked at me. "Handsome man, let me see." She thrust her painted lips up to mine as though daring me to kiss them. Hope shoved her away. Her parted cloak showed her white, beautiful body with the dark tresses of her hair shrouding it. Exotically lovely she was, with primitive, unrestrained passions—typical of the land in which she lived.

"This way," whispered Hope. "Keep close together. Do not speak!"

We moved forward and stood quietly against the wall of the room, where great curtains hid us partly from view. Under a canopy, at a table on a raised platform near one end of the apartment, sat the youthful monarch. I saw him as a man of perhaps thirty. He was in holiday garb, robed in silken hose of red and white, a strangely fashioned doublet, and a close-fitting shirt. Bareheaded, with thick black hair, long to the base of his neck.

He sat at the table with a calm dignity. But he relaxed here in the presence of his favored courtiers. He was evidently in a high good humor this night, giving directions for

the staging of the spectacle, despatching messengers. I stood gazing at him. A very kingly fellow this. There was about him, that strange mingled look of barbarism and modernity.

We were just in time. Hope whispered, "The king will be here any moment."

BENEATH the canopy was a broad arena of seats. A platform, like a stage, was at one end. It was brilliantly illuminated with colored torches held aloft by girls in flowing robes, each standing like a statue with her light held high. The place was crowded. In the gloom of the darkened auditorium we found seats off to one side, near the open edge of the canopy. We sat, with Hope between us.

Derek whispered, "Shakespeare might have staged a play in a fashion like this."

A primitive theatrical performance. There was no curtain for interlude between what might have been the acts of a vaudeville. The torch girls, like pages, ranged themselves in a line across the front of the stage. They were standing there as we took our seats. The vivid glare of their torches concealed the stage behind them.

There was a few moments wait, then, amid hushed silence, the king with his retinue came in. He sat in a canopied box off to one side. When he was seated, he raised his arm and the buzz of conversation in the audience began again.

Presently the page girls moved aside from the stage. The buzz of the audience was stilled. The performance, destined to end so soon in tragedy, now began.

## CHAPTER VII - The Crimson Murderess

HOPE murmured, "The three-part music comes first. There will first be the spiritual."

An orchestra was seated on the stage in a semi-circle. It was composed of men and women musicians, and there seemed to be over a hundred of them. They sat in three groups; the center group was about to play. In a solemn hush the leaderless choir, with all its players garbed in white, began its first faint note. I craned to get a clear view of the stage. This white choir seemed almost all wood-wind. There were tiny pipes in little series such as Pan might have used. Flutes, and flageolets; and round-bellied little instruments of clay, like ocarinas. And pitch-pipes, long and slender as a marsh reed.

In a moment I was lost in the music. It began softly, with single muted notes from a single instrument, echoed by the others, running about the choir like a will-o'-the-wisp. It was faint, as though very far away, made more sweet by distance. And then it swelled, came nearer.

I had never heard such music as this. Primitive! It was not that. Nor barbaric! Nothing like the music of our ancient world. Nor was it what I might conceive to be the music of our future. A thing apart, unworldly, ethereal. It swept me, carried me off; it was an exaltation of the spirit lifting me. It was triumphant now. It surged, but there was in its rhythm, the beat of its every instrument, nothing but the soul of purity. And then it shimmered into distance again, faint and exquisite music of a dream. Crooning, pleading, the speech of whispering angels.

It ceased. There was a storm of applause.

I breathed again. Why, this was what music might be in our world but was not. I thought of our blaring jazz.

Hope said, "Now they play the physical music. Then Sensua will dance with Blanca. We will see then which one the king chooses."

ON the stage all the torches were extinguished save those which were red. The arena was darker than before. The stage was bathed with a deep crimson. Music of the physical senses! It was, indeed, no more like the other choir than is the body to the spirit.

There were stringed instruments playing now; deep-toned, singing zithers, and instruments of rounded, swelling bodies, like great viols with sensuous, throbbing voices. Music with a swift rhythm, marked by the thump of hollow gourds. It rose with its voluptuous swell into a paean of abandonment, and upon the tide of it, the crimson Sensua flung herself upon the stage. She stood motionless for a moment that all might regard her. The crimson torchlight bathed her, stained crimson the white flush of her limbs, her heavy shoulders, her full, rounded throat.

A woman in her late twenties. Voluptuous of figure, with crimson veils half-hiding, half-revealing it. A face of coarse, sensuous beauty. A face wholly evil, and it seemed to me wholly debauched. Dark eyes with beaded lashes. Heavy lips painted scarlet. A pagan woman of the streets. One might have encountered such a woman swaggering in some ancient street of some ancient city, flaunting the finery given her by a rich and profligate eastern prince.

She stood a moment with smoldering, passion-filled eyes, gazing from beneath her lowered lids. Her glance went to the king's canopy, and flashed a look of confidence, of triumph. The king answered it with a smile. He leaned forward over his railing, watching her intently.

With the surge of the music she moved into her dance. Slowly she began, quite slowly. A posturing and swaying of hips like a nautch girl. She made the rounds of the

musicians, leering at them. She stood in the whirl of the music, almost ignoring it, stood at the front of the stage with a gaze of slumbrous, insolent passion flung at the king. A knife was in her hand now. She held it aloft. The red torchlight caught its naked blade. With shuddering fancy I seemed to see it dripping crimson. She frowned, and struck it at a phantom lover. She backed away. She stooped and knelt. She knelt and seemed with her empty arms to be caressing a murdered lover's head. She kissed him, rained upon his dead lips her macabre kisses.

And then she was up on her bare feet, again circling the stage. Her anklets clanked as she moved with the tread of a tigress. The musicians shrank from her waving blade.

A GIRL in white veils was suddenly disclosed standing at the back of the stage.

Derek whispered, "Is that Blanca?"

"Yes," whispered Hope.

Blanca stood watching her rival. The crimson Sensua passed her, took her suddenly by the wrist, drew her forward. For an instant I thought it might have been rehearsed. I saw Blanca as a slim, gentle girl in white, with a white head-dress. A dancer who could symbolize purity, now in the grip of red passion.

An instant, and then horror struck us. And I could feel it surge over the audience. A gasp of horror. The frightened girl in white tried to escape. The musicians wavered and broke. I stared, stricken, with freezing blood. Upon the stage the knife went swiftly up; it came down; then up again. The red Sensua stood gloating. The knife she waved aloft was truly dripping crimson now.

With a choked, gasping scream the white girl of the toilers crumpled and fell. ... She lay motionless, at the feet of the crimson murderess.

## CHAPTER VIII - "Why, This Is Treason!"

THERE was a gasp. The audience sat frozen. On the stage, with no one lifting a hand to stop her, the crimson murderess made a leap and vanished. A moment, and then the spell broke. A girl in the audience screamed. Some one moved to stand up and overturned a seat with a crash.

The amphitheater under the canopy broke into a pandemonium. Screams and shouts, crashing of seats, screaming, frightened people struggling to get out of the darkness. The torches on the stage were dropped and extinguished. The, darkness leaped upon us.

Derek and I were gripping Hope. We were struck by a bench flung backward from in front. People were rushing at us. We were swept along in the panic of the crowd.

I heard Derek shout, "We must keep together!"

We fought, but we were swept backward. We found ourselves outside the canopy. Torchlight was here. It glimmered on the pool of water. People were everywhere rushing past us, some one way, some another. Aimless, with the shock of terror upon them. Under the canopy they were still screaming.

I was momentarily separated from Derek and Hope. I very nearly stumbled into the pool. A girl was here, crouched on the stone bank. Her wet crimson veils clung to her white body. Her long, wet hair lay on her. I stumbled against her. She raised her face. Eyes, wide with terror. Mute, painted red lips. . . .

I heard Derek calling again, "Charlie!" I shoved my way back to him. The crowd was thinning out around us. Girls were climbing from the pool, rushing off in terror, to mingle with the milling throng. Among the crowd now, down by the edge of the bay, I saw the sinister figures of men come running. The toilers, miraculously appearing everywhere! I saw, across the pool, a terrified girl crouching. A huge man in a black cloak

came leaping. The colored lights in the trees glittered on his upraised knife blade as it descended. The girl fell with a shuddering scream. The murderer turned and whirled away, into the crowd.

"Charlie!"

I was back with Derek and Hope. Hope stood trembling, with her hand pressed against her mouth. Derek gripped me.

"That cloak, get it off!" He ripped his crimson cloak from him and tossed it away. He jerked mine off. "Too dangerous! That's the crimson badge of death to-night."

We stood revealed in the clothes of our own world. My business suit, in which that day I had worked in Wall Street. Derek in his swagger uniform. He stood drawn to his full height, a powerful figure. The wires of our mechanism showed at his wrists. They dangled at the back of his neck, mounting to that strangely fashioned electrode clamped to his head. Strange, awe-inspiring figure of a man! We were momentarily alone under the colored lights of the trees. Hope murmured, "But they will see us—see you. . . ."

Derek's face was grim, but at her words he laughed harshly. "See us! What matter?" He swung on me. "It forces our hand; we've got to come out in the open now! This murder—this king! My God, what a fool to let himself get into such a condition as this! His people—this chaos—what a fool!"

He had drawn his dirk. I realized that I was holding mine. Near us the body of a crimson noble was lying under a tree. A sword was there on the ground. Derek sprang for it, waved it aloft.

I think that no more than a minute or two had passed since the murder. Down by the water the boats were hastily loading and leaving the dock. One of them overturned. There were screams everywhere. Red forms lay inert upon the ground where they had

been tramped, or stabbed. But the prowling figures of the toilers now seemed to have vanished.

Derek gestured. "Look at the palace! The garden!"

Beyond the canopy I could see the dim gardens surrounding the palace. I glimpsed the high fence, and the gateway in front. A mob of toilers was there. The guard at the gate had fled. The mob was surging through. Men and women in the vivid garments of the fields, armed with sticks and clubs and stones and the implements of agriculture. They milled at the gate; rushed through; scattered over the garden. Their shouts floated back to us in a blended murmur.

We were standing only a dozen feet from the edge of the pavilion. No one seemed yet to have noticed us. A few straggling lights had come on under the canopy. I could see the dead lying there in the wreckage of overturned seats.

Derek said, "We can't help it—it's done. Look at them! They're attacking the palace!"

This mob springing miraculously into existence! I realized that the toilers had planned that if Sensua were chosen they would attack the festival. The murder of Blanca had come as big a surprise to them as to us. . . ."

"Come on! Can you get into the palace, Hope? The king must have gotten back there. Get your wits, girl!" Derek stood gripping her, shaking her.

"Yes, there's an underground passage. He probably went that way."

From the palace gardens the shouts of the mob sounded, louder now. And from within the building there was an alarm bell tumultuously clanging.

Hope gasped, "This way."

She led us back into the pavilion. We clambered over its broken seats, past its grewsome huddled figures. Some were still moving.... We went to a small door under the



platform. A dim room was here, deserted now. Against the wall was a large wardrobe closet; stage costumes were hanging in it. The closet was fully twenty feet deep. We pushed our way through the hanging garments. Hope fumbled at the blank board wall in the rear. Her groping fingers found a secret panel. A door swung aside and a rush of dank cool air came at us. The dark outlines of a tunnel stretched ahead.

"In, Charlie!"

I crouched and stepped through the door. Hope closed it behind us. The tunnel passage was black, but soon we began to see its vague outlines. Derek, sword in hand, led us. I clutched my dirk. We went perhaps five hundred feet. Down at first, then up again. I figured we were under the palace gardens now, as the tunnel was winding to the left. There were occasional small lights.

Derek whispered to Hope, "The toilers don't know of this?"

"No."

"Where does it bring us out?" I whispered.

"Into the lower floor of the castle. The king must have gone this way. There might be a guard, Derek. What will you do?"

He laughed. "I can handle this mob. Disperse it! You'll see! And handle the king." He laughed again grimly. "There is no Blanca to choose now."

The tunnel went round a sharp angle and began steeply ascending. Derek stopped.

"How much further, Hope?"

"Not far," she whispered.

We crept forward. The tunnel was more like a small corridor now. Beyond Derek's crouching figure, in the dimness I could see a doorway. Derek turned and gestured to us to keep back. A palace guard was standing there. His pike went up.

"Who are you?"

"A friend."

But the man lunged with his pike. Derek leaped aside. His sword flashed; the flat of it struck the fellow in the face. Derek, with incredible swiftness, was upon him. They went down together, and before the man could shout, Derek had struck him on the head with the sword hilt. The guard lay motionless. Derek climbed up as we ran forward to join him.

I noticed now, for the first time, that in his left hand Derek held a small metal cylinder. A weapon, strange to me, which he had brought with him. He had not mentioned it. He had produced it, when menaced by this guard. Then he evidently decided not to use it.

He shoved it back in his pocket. He whirled on us, panting. "Hurry! Close that door!"

We closed the door of the tunnel.

"Charlie, help me move him!" We dragged the prostrate figure of the unconscious guard aside into a shadow of the wall. We were in a lower room of the palace. It seemed momentarily unoccupied. Overhead we could hear the footsteps of running people. A confusion in the palace, and outside in the garden the shouts of the menacing throng of toilers. And above it all, the wild clanging of the alarm bell from the palace tower.

Derek said swiftly, "Get us to the king!"

Hope led us through the castle corridors, and up a flight of steps to the main floor. The rooms here were thronged with terrified people—crimson nobles in their bedraggled finery of the festival. In all the chaos no one seemed to notice us.

We mounted another staircase. We found a vacant room; through its windows we looked a moment, gazing into the garden. It was jammed with a menacing mob, which milled about, leaderless, waving crude weapons, shouting imprecations at the palace. At

the foot of the main steps the throng stood packed, but none dared to mount. A group of the palace guards stood on the platform over the moat.

Derek turned away impatiently. "Let's get to the king."

We mounted to the upper story. The castle occupants stared at Derek and me as we passed them. A group of girls at the head of the staircase fled before us.

"The king," Derek demanded. "Which is his apartment? Hurry, Hope, we've no time now!"

We found the frightened king seated on a couch with his counsellors around him. It was a small room in this top story of the castle, with long windows to the floor. I saw that they gave onto a balcony which overlooked the gardens. There were perhaps twenty or thirty people huddled in the room. A confusion existed here as everywhere else—no one knowing what to do in this crisis. And that cursed alarm bell wildly adding to the turmoil. We paused at the doorway.

"Now," whispered Derek. He drew himself to his full height. His eyes were flashing. It was a Derek I had not seen before; he wore an air of mastery. As though he, and not the frightened, trembling monarch on the couch, were master here. And as I stared at him that instant in this primitive chaotic environment, the power of him swept me. A conqueror. The strange electrode clamped to his head gave him an aspect miraculous, awe inspiring.

He strode forward across the apartment. The king was just giving some futile, vague command to be transmitted to his guards down below. A hush fell over the room at our appearance. The king half stood up, then sank back.

"Why—why—who—"

I saw Rohbar here. His long crimson cloak hung from his shoulders, with its hood thrown back. Beneath it, as it parted in front, his leather uniform was visible. A sword

was strapped to his waist. He was striding back and forth with folded arms, frowning, but his gaze was very keen. Rohbar was not frightened. He seemed rather to be gauging the situation, pondering how he might turn it to his own ends. He stopped short and swung about to face us. His jaw dropped with surprise, amazement, at our strangeness.

Derek confronted him. His bulk, and huge weight towered even over Derek. The king gasped and sat helplessly staring.

Rohbar spoke first. "Who are you?"

"This mob must be dispersed. Don't stand looking at me like that, man!" Derek spoke in friendly fashion, but vehemently. "This is no time for explanations."

They were menacing each other. Rohbar's heavy hand fell to his sword, but Derek boldly pushed him away. He faced the king.

"Your Majesty. . . ."

The king stared blankly at him. The title was no doubt strange to this realm, but no stranger than Derek's aspect.

"Your Majesty. . . ."

But the noise from the garden, the confusion which now broke out in the room, and that damnable clattering bell, drowned his words.

The king found his voice. "Be quiet, all of you!" He was on his feet. He demanded of Derek again, "Who are you?"

Derek said swiftly, "I'll show you. I can disperse this mob! Charlie, come."

It seemed as though the gaze of everyone in the room went to me. I drew myself up and flashed defiance back at them. And I followed Derek to one of the balcony windows. He went through it, with me after him. I stood at the threshold, watchful of the room behind us. Rohbar was standing aside, and I saw now the woman Sensua with him. They were whispering, staring at me and Derek.

I had been wondering why, when Sensua must have known that the king would choose her—why she had dared to murder her rival. I thought now—as I saw her with Rohbar—that I could guess the reason. She loved Rohbar, not the king. Rohbar was plotting to put himself on the throne, using Sensua as a lover to that end. He had doubtless persuaded her to this murder, knowing it would arouse the toilers, precipitate this chaos which was what he wanted. Scheming scoundrel! I could not forget the look of desire on his face as he had accosted Hope. . . .

And now Derek appeared, to add an unknown element to Rohbar's plans. There was no way he could guess who or what we were. I saw that he was puzzled, was whispering to Sensua about us, doubtless wondering how to handle us.

I saw too, that there were half a dozen crimson cloaked men here who were not frightened. They had gathered in a group. They stood with hands upon their swords, eyeing me, and watching Rohbar—as though at a sign from him they would rush me.

On the balcony Derek stood with the light from the room upon him. The crowd saw him. The main gateway of the palace was just under his balcony. The crowd had now started up the steps to where the guards were standing at the top. At the sight of Derek the mob let out a roar, and those on the steps retreated down again.

Derek stood at the balcony rail, silent, with upraised arms, gazing down upon the menacing throng. There was a moment of startled silence as he appeared. Then the shout broke out louder than before. The crowd was milling and pushing, but still leaderless. An aimless activity. Someone threw a stone. It came hurtling up. It missed Derek and struck the castle wall, falling. almost at my feet.

Derek did not move. He stood calmly gazing down; stood like an orator waiting for the confusion to die before he would speak.

From the platform, just beneath Derek, the guards were staring wonderingly up, awed, startled. To the right a wing of the building turned an angle. The castle tower was there: it rose perhaps a hundred feet higher than our balcony. On the railed platform-balcony girding its top I saw the figures of other guards standing, gazing down at Derek. The clanging bell up there was suddenly stilled.

I became aware of the king close behind me. His voice rang out: "What are you doing? How dare you?"

Derek whirled, "You fool! To what a pass you have come! Your people in arms against you. . . ."

His violent words brought the king's anger. "How dare you! This is treason!"

I stood alert, with my hand upon my dirk.

There would be conflict here. I felt that we could not hold it off more than a moment longer. My mind leaped to that metal cylinder Derek had concealed. A weapon? Then why did he not have it out now? His eyes were flashing. The aspect of power, of confidence, upon him was unmistakable. It heartened me. I took a step toward him.

He smiled faintly. "Wait, Charlie."

The king gasped again. "How dare you? Why, this is treason! Rohbar, seize him!"

Hope was beside me, her eyes watching the room. Rohbar came striding forward. Derek rasped, "You perhaps have some sense! Lead His Majesty away. Take care of him until this is over."

They stood with crossing glances. And upon Rohbar's face a look, queerly sinister, had come. A smile, sardonic.

He said abruptly to the king, "I think we should let him have his way. What harm?"

He gestured and Sensua came forward. The crimson murderess! Her voluptuous figure was shrouded in a crimson cloak. Her heavy painted lips smiled at the King. Her rounded white arms went over his shoulders.

"Leonto, do as Rohbar says. Let this stranger try. It can do no harm." The king yielded to her; I watched as she and Rohbar urged him through an archway that gave into the adjoining apartment.

No wonder Rohbar was sardonically smiling! Derek had played into his hand. We did not know it then, but we were soon to find it out.

## CHAPTER IX - "Alexandre—"

DEREK turned back to the balcony. It had been a brief interlude. The mob in the garden, the soldiers at the top of the stairway, and the other guards high on the bridge of the tower were all standing gazing. Shouts again arose as Derek appeared. Again he raised his arms. This time his voice rang out.

"Silence all of you! I am a friend! Silence!"

At first they did not heed him; then someone shouted:

"Quiet! Listen to him! Let him talk!"

The crowd was bellowing, and then they ceased. The bell was still. In the hush came Derek's voice:

"I am a friend. I come from foreign lands, from distant lands of strange people and strange magic."

For answer the crowd shouted and milled in confusion. A stone came up and then another. Derek stood immovable, like a statue gazing down at them.

"I command you to disperse. You will not? Then look at me! Look at me, all of you. My will is law beyond this king—beyond these palace soldiers—beyond any power you have ever known."

Then I knew a part of Derek's purpose! He had pressed the mechanism at his wrist. He stood imperious with upraised arms. The garden was in a tumult, but in a moment it died. A wave of horror swept the crowd. A freezing, incredulous horror. They stood staring, incredulous, silent, swept with a widening wave of horror.

The figure of Derek on the balcony was fading, turning luminous. A wraith, a ghost of his menacing shape standing there. It faded until it was almost gone, and then, as he reversed the mechanism, it materialized again. A moment passed, then he stood again solid before them.



His voice rang out, "Will you obey me now? I am a friend of the toilers!"

They were prostrate before him. There is no fear more terrible than the fear of the supernatural. In all of history there has been in our world no worship more abject than the worship and fear of a primitive people for its supernatural God. On the platform beneath the balcony, the palace soldiers stared up, horrified. Then they two were prostrate before Derek's threatening gestures and commanding voice.

I stood watching, listening. And suddenly, from the prostrate crowd, a man leaped up. In the silence his amazed voice carried over the garden.

"Alexandre! It is our Prince Alexandre! Our lost prince!"

He stood staring at Derek, his arms gesturing to his comrade around him. He shouted it again:

"Our rightful king, come back to us! Don't you recognize him? I saw him go! He went like that—fading into a ghost. Ten years ago, when Leonto killed his father and would have killed him had he not escaped!"

The crowd was standing up now. They recognized Derek! There was no doubt of it. The garden was ringing with the tumultuous shouts,

"Alexandre! Our lost prince has come back to us!"

My head was whirling with it. Derek, prince of this realm? I could see that it was true. Escaped from here as a young lad when his throne was usurped. Returning now, a man, to claim his own.

And suddenly he turned and flashed me his smile.

The din from the garden drowned his words. The crowd was shouting: "Alexandre! Our lost prince!"

The king's guards on the lower platform stood sullen, confused. I heard footsteps behind me. I whirled around.

From the room, the group of Rohbar's crimson nobles were rushing toward me! Their swords were out. One of them shouted, "Kill them now! We must kill them and have done!"

There were five or six men in the group. They were no more than ten feet away from me. They came leaping.

I stood in the window opening, with only my dirk to oppose them. I shouted, "Derek! Derek!"

I think I took a step backward. I was out on the balcony. It flashed over me—Derek and I were caught out here!

The first of the red cloaked figures Came hurtling through the doorway. I leaped to avoid his sword. I saw the others crowding behind him.

Then I felt Derek shove me violently aside. I half fell, but recovered myself at the balcony rail. Five of the crimson nobles were on the balcony. Derek confronted them. His aspect made them pause. They stood, with outstretched swords. The garden was silent; the crowd stared up. And in the silence Derek roared,

"Get back! All of you, go back inside! Back, or I'll kill you!"

In Derek's right hand he held the cylinder outstretched, leveled at the menacing nobles.

"Back, I say!"

But instead they rushed him. There was a flash. From the cylinder it seemed that a ray spat out, a flash of silver light. It caught the three men who were in advance of the others. Their swords dropped with a clatter to the balcony floor. They stood, transfixed.

An instant. Derek's silver ray played upon them. Their red cloaks were painted with its silver sheen.

They were shimmering! I gasped, staring. The other nobles, beyond the ray, had fallen back. And they too stood staring in horror.

Another instant. The three figures wavered. I saw the face of one of them, with the shock of incredulous horror still upon it. A face turning luminous! A face, erased, with only the staring eyes to mark where it had been!

There was a moment when the three stricken men stood like shimmering ghosts, with Derek's deadly ray upon them. Then they were gone! It seemed, just as they vanished, that they were falling through the balcony floor. ...

Derek snapped off his ray. He rasped, "Back into that room, I tell you!"

The remaining nobles fled before him. He turned again to the balcony rail.

"My people—yes, I am Alexandre—I had not thought you would recognize me so soon. But you are right—the time has come for me to claim my inheritance. And I will rule you justly."

His cylinder was still in his hand; he swept a watchful glance behind him. I thought of Rohbar. He was in the next room, with the king. Had they seen this attack upon Derek? They must have heard the crowd shouting, "Alexandre!" It seemed strange they did not appear.

I recall now, as I look back to this moment on the balcony, that I suddenly thought of Hope. She had been beside me just before the nobles attacked. I did not see her now. I was startled, but thought of her was driven from my mind. From within the palace a scream sounded. A girl screaming.

But it was not Hope's voice. A girl, screaming, and then shouting:

"The king is dead!"

Derek came rushing at me. "Charlie, that—"

We heard it again. "The king is dead!"

We hurried into the adjoining room. There was no one to stop us—no one up here now who dared oppose Derek. The terrified nobles in the room fell cringing before him.

"Alexandre—spare us! We are loyal to you!"

He strode past them. In the adjacent apartment we found the king lying upon the floor. A wound in his throat welled crimson. He had evidently been lying here alone, and had just now been found by a girl who had entered. He was not quite dead. Derek bent over him. He opened his eyes.

He gasped faintly: "Rohbar—killed me. Rohbar and that—accursed crimson Sensua. ..."

His voice trailed away. The light went out of his staring eyes. Derek laid him gently back on the floor.

And as though already the news of his death had miraculously spread, the bell in the castle tower began tolling. Not clanging now. Tolling, with slow, solemn accent. The crowd evidently recognized it. We could hear the shouts: "Death! Death has come!"

Derek's eyes were blazing as he stood up. "The end, Charlie! I would not have planned this, and yet. ..."

He did not finish. He whirled, rushed back to the other room and to the balcony. The scene was again in confusion, the crowd milling, voices shouting:

"The king is dead!"

At the edge of the garden a woman's shrill, hysterical laughter rose over the din.

Derek called, "Yes, the king is dead!" He paused. Then he added, "If you want me—if I have your loyalty—I will claim my throne."

A tumult interrupted him. "Alexandre! King Alexandre!"

He spread his arms, but he could not silence them.

"The king is dead. Long live King Alexandre!"

A wave of it swept over the garden, engulfing the castle. At the main entrance Leonto's soldiers stood sullen, listening to it.

Derek stood triumphant. His hands were outstretched, palms down. But up on the circular bridge at the top of the tower there was a sudden commotion. The soldiers up there had vanished, moved back within the tower to make room for other figures. I stared amazed, transfixed. A huge man in leather garments was there, with a sword stuck in his wide belt. A man with a bullet head, a heavy face, gazing down. ...

Rohbar!

And held in front of him the slender figure of a girl. Hope! He clutched her, his thick arm encircling her breast. With sinking heart I realized what had happened. Hope had moved away from me. Every one in the room had been intent upon Derek. Rohbar had come quietly in, after murdering the king, had seized Hope, stifled her outcry, and had taken her up into the tower.

And I had promised Derek that I would shield this girl from harm! The horror of it—the self-condemnation of it—swept me, froze me to numbness. I could not think; I could only stand and stare. Rohbar held Hope like a shield before him. The low railing hardly reached her knees. A sheer drop to the garden beneath. He held her tightly, and in his free hand I saw his dirk come up menacingly against her white throat. His voice called:

"Silent, down there! Alexandre, you traitor! Silence!"

Derek stared up. The triumph faded from him. He stared, stricken. The crowd stared. The soldiers on the lower platform ceased their shouting and gazed up at these new actors, come so unexpectedly upon the stage. Again Rohbar called, to the guards this time:

"I represent your King Leonto. This Alexandre is a traitor to us all. And he cannot harm me! I defy him. Look at him! I defy him to use his evil weapon upon me!"

Derek was silent. A single adverse move and Rohbar's knife would stab into Hope's throat. Derek's ray was powerless. A flash from it would have killed Hope, not Rohbar.

The king's soldiers saw Derek's indecision. One of them shouted, "He cannot harm us! Look, he is frightened!"

The crowd recognized Hope. They began calling her name. And calling, "Master Rohbar, do not harm our Hope!"

"I will not harm her! Not if you do what I tell you! Leave the garden—go quietly! I will deal with this traitor!"

He added to the guards, "Go up and seize him! He cannot hurt you! Traitor! Seize him! If he does not yield—if any of this crowd attacks you—then I will kill Hope,"

Derek stood clinging to the balcony rail. With Rohbar's watchful gaze upon him he did not dare turn or move. I was standing back from the balcony, behind Derek and partly in the room. No one thought of me. No one from outside could see me. And I, who had played no part in this, save that one I had neglected, suddenly saw my role. My cue was sounding. My role to play, here upon this tumultuous stage.

I turned back into the dim room. A few frightened men and girls were here. They were all crowding forward, gazing through the windows at the scene outside. No one noticed me, but I saw, with sudden realization, my role to play.

I darted across the room, out into the dim, deserted corridor of the castle.

## CHAPTER X - My Role to Play

I SLIPPED like a shadow through the almost empty corridors. Down on the lower floor I found that many of the soldiers were on the inside, standing about the corridors in groups, waiting for word from their comrades on the platform to indicate what action they should take. My time was short; I knew that within a few minutes they would be rushing up to overpower Derek.

I stood unseen against the wall near the main entrance. I could not get outside. There were too many soldiers there.

I tried to keep my sense of direction. The wing upon which the tower stood was about two hundred feet from me here. If I could not get outside I would have to try the inside, along this corridor. I prayed that I might not make an error. I tried to gauge exactly where the tower would be.

The hallway was almost dark, and in this wing there chanced to be no one at the moment. I came to the angle and turned it to the left. I was unarmed save my dirk. I drew it. But I encountered no one. I passed the doors of many empty rooms. The windows were all barred on this lower floor. I could hear the shouts of the crowd outside.

I came at last to the end of the wing, A staircase here led upward. I guessed that I was directly under the tower now, and that this staircase undoubtedly led upward into it. I mounted a few steps to verify what I was sure would be the condition. It was as I thought. Rohbar had won over the soldiers who were here. He had sent them down from the tower bridge. They were guarding this staircase.

I crept up another few steps, very cautiously. I could hear their voices on the stairs. A light was up there. I could see the legs of some of them as they crowded the stairs. I softly retreated.

There was no way of getting up into the tower here. Alone and armed only with my dirk, I could not mount these stairs and assail a dozen armed men standing above me; especially when, if I raised an alarm, Rohbar overhead might be startled into killing Hope.

I stood another moment, thinking, planning my actions. I was trembling. Everything depended upon me now. I must get up into the tower. And, above everything, haste was necessary.

I retreated back to the lower floor. I was still some twenty feet above the ground, I judged. That was too far. A dozen paces along the hall I saw a stairway leading downward into the ground level cellar of the castle. I marked in my mind exactly in which direction I turned, and how far. I went down the stairs.

There was an empty lower room. It was pitch black. I lay down on its earthen floor. Above me, a few paces off to one side I could visualize the tower. A hundred and fifty feet above me, at least, up to that bridge balcony, where Rohbar stood with Hope. I kept my mind on it and prayed that I might not be making an error, a miscalculation.

I prayed, too, that luck would be with me. A desperate chance, yet I thought I knew what was here, or about here, in New York City. I lay on my side, alone in the blackness, and pressed the switch at my wrist....

The familiar sensation of the transition began. The darkness grew luminous. Around me shadows were taking form. My body was humming, thrilling with the vibrations within it. I could feel the ground under me seeming to melt. My head was reeling. Nausea swept me, but with it all I tried to keep my wits. I must watch this new Space into which I was going. Space? I prayed that here on this spot in New York City there would be empty space! If not, at the first warning, I was prepared to stop my mechanism.



The shadows grew around me. There was a moment or two when I felt as though I were floating. Weightless. The sense of my body hovering in a void, intangible, imponderable, with only my struggling mentality holding it together. ...

And then I felt myself materializing. Around me walls were taking form. I floated down a foot or two and came to rest upon a new floor. My hand brushed it. My physical senses were returning. I could feel a floor of concrete. A vague, shimmering light was near me. It seemed to outline the rectangle of a window. All around was darkness. Empty darkness. Soundless, with only the throbbing hum of the mechanism.

I was indoors, in a room. I felt suddenly almost normal, except for the whirring vibration. I flung the switch again. There was a shock. A whirling of my senses. Then I sat up; my head steadied. The nausea passed.

I was back in my own world, in New York City. This was night: I tried to calculate the time. Derek and I had departed about midnight. This would be, then some time before dawn. I was in a cellar room, lying on its cement floor. There was a window, with a faint light outside it. A window up near the ceiling. A straggling illumination showed me a bin, a few barrels, a door leading into another room which looked as though it might be a machine shop.

I sat up, calculating. I was a thousand feet perhaps from the Battery wall, two hundred feet from the Hudson River. This was an office building, and I was in one of its cellar rooms, at the ground level.

Near dawn? I tried to calculate what might be overhead. A deserted office building. Too early yet for the scrubwomen. The elevator would not be running. I laughed to myself. Of what use to me an elevator, if it had been running? How could I, a midnight prowler, appear from the cellar of this building, and demand to be taken upstairs! There would be no elevator, but there would be watchmen. I would avoid them.

I found a door. My heart leaped with a sudden fear that it would be locked, but it was not. I went through it into a passage and found the staircase. I made two turns. I tried again to keep my mind on this Space here. I stood, carefully thinking. I had it clear. I had made no move without careful thought. The tower with Rohbar was still to my left, and about directly above me.

I went up the short stone staircase, opened another door carefully. I was in the dim lower hall of the office building. I found myself beside the deserted elevator shaft. A light was burning on the night attendant's table in an alcove on the other side of the shaft. He sat there with his back to me. I closed the door soundlessly.

The stairway upward beside the elevator was here. I watched my chance. I darted around the angle and went up. I met no one. The concrete staircase had a light at each floor. Four floors up. No, not enough! I opened the fourth floor door. The marble hall of the office building was empty and silent. Rows of locked office doors with their gold-leaf names and numbers. A single dim light to illumine the silent emptiness. ...

I retreated into the staircase shaft and mounted higher. My dirk was in my hand. Charlie Wilson, the Wall Street brokerage clerk, prowling here! And upon what a strange adventure!

I came to what I thought was the proper floor. In the hall I selected a room. The door was securely locked. I had no way of breaking the lock, but the panel was of opaque glass. I would have to chance the noise. I rushed the length of the hall, to where a red fireax hung in a bracket. I came back with it. I smashed the glass panel of the door.

Would a watchman hear me? I did not wait to find out. With the ax I scraped away the splinters of glass. I climbed through the opening. My hand was cut, but I did not heed it.

I was in a dim, silent office, with rugs on the floor, desks standing about, filing cases, a water-cooler, and a safe in the corner. I rushed to one of the windows. It looked over Battery Park and the upper bay. The stars were shining, but to the east over Brooklyn I could see them paling with the coming dawn. I gazed down to try and calculate my height. Yes, this would be about right. And my position. I could see the outline of the shore, the trees of Battery Park, the busy harbor, even at this hour before dawn, thronged with the moving lights of its boats.

I saw all this with my eyes, but with my mind I saw the wrecked, deserted pavilion, and the gardens of Leonto's castle. The threatening mob would be below me. The palace entrance would be here to my left, down in the street where those taxis were parked. There was a commotion down there by the office building entrance. I know now what caused it, but at the time I did not notice. The wing of the castle was under me. This would be the tower. Its upper room, or the balcony, just about where I was standing. I prayed that it might be so. I seemed with my mind to see it all.

I lay down on the floor by the window. Out in the office building hallway I heard heavy footsteps come running. One of the night watchmen had evidently heard the glass crashed. I laughed. I pressed the switch at my wrist. . . .

## CHAPTER XI - The Fight on the Tower Balcony

THE sensations swept me again. The room faded. Whether the watchmen came in to see a ghost of me lying there on the floor I did not know, nor did I care. I whirled into the shadows. And came in a moment out of the black silence. The office room was gone. I seemed to have fallen or floated down—how far I do not know. A triumph swept me. I was lying on another floor. I could see a doorway materializing. I was not upon the balcony as I had calculated, but within the tower room. New walls sprang around me.

I did not heed it, this time, the sensation of the transition. I was too alert to what new situation might come upon me. The tower room. I could see it. I could see its oval windows close at hand. The doorway to its balcony. Sounds flooded me, mingled- with the humming within me. Familiar sounds. The crowd shouting. And a single voice—the voice of Rohbar. Vague and blurred, but as I materialized it became clearer.

I was suddenly aware that there was a man beside me. One of the palace soldiers. He saw me materialize. He leaped backward in horror. I flung my switch. I was on my feet, swaying, and then I leaped upon him. My dirk plunged downward into his chest. The thing made me shudder. I reeled with the sickness of it, but as he fell I clung to the dirk and ripped it out of him. It was dripping with his blood.

I stood trembling. The small tower room had no other occupants. I turned toward the door. I could see a patch of stars, paling with the coming dawn. I crouched in the small doorway which gave onto the balcony, staring, swiftly calculating. The scene had scarcely changed. But some of the soldiers had left the entrance platform, gone, no doubt, into the castle on their way upstairs to seize Derek.

On this upper balcony, no more than ten feet before me, Rohbar still stood gripping Hope. She was in front of him. His back was to me. A sudden jump, and I could plunge my dagger into his back.

Rohbar was shouting, "King Leonto is dead. If you should want me to succeed him, I will take this girl Hope for my queen. You all love her. . . ."

I was tense to spring. Then out in the balcony, to one side, I saw Sensua crouching. Her crimson robe fell away to bare her white limbs. Her hand fumbled in her robe. She had been Rohbar's dupe, and now she knew it. Her knife was in her hand. Frenzied with jealousy and rage she sprang upon Rohbar's back, trying to stab at Hope.

Perhaps he sensed her coming, heard her; or perhaps she was unskilful. Her knife only grazed Hope's shoulder. He released Hope. He roared. He turned and gripped his murderous assailant. A second or two while I stood watching. He caught Sensua's wrist, twisted the knife from it and plunged the knife into her breast. She sank with a scream at his feet, and as he straightened he saw me.

But I had leaped. I was upon him. His own knife had remained in Sensua's breast. As I raised mine in my leap, he caught at my wrist; twisted it, but I flung the knife away before he could get it. The knife fell over the balcony rail. The weight of my hurtling body flung him backward, but the rail caught him. His arms went around me. Powerful arms, crushing me. I gripped at his throat.

There was an instant when I thought that we would both topple over the railing. I felt Hope beside us. I heard her scream. We did not go over the rail, for Rohbar lurched and flung us back. We dropped to the balcony floor, rolling, locked together. He was far stronger and heavier than I. He came uppermost. He lunged and broke my hold upon his throat, but I was agile: I squirmed from under him. I almost regained my feet. He got up on one knee. He was trying to draw his sword. Then again I bore into him, kicking and tearing. He roared like a bull. And ignoring my plucking fingers, my flailing fists, he lunged to his feet with me gripping again at his throat.

His huge height swung me off the ground. I was aware that he had drawn his sword, but I was too close for him to use it. He swayed drunkenly with my weight; he was confused. I felt the rail behind us. We lunged again into it. Again I heard Hope scream in terror, and saw her leap at us. Rohbar stooped, trying to clutch the low rail. His bending down brought my feet to the balcony floor. With a last despairing effort I shoved him backward. And as he toppled at the rail, I fought to break his hold upon me. I felt us going and then I felt Hope reach me. Her arms flung about my waist. Her hold tore me loose. Robbar's huge body fell away....

For an instant Rohbar seemed balanced upon the rail; then he went over. He gave a last long, agonized scream as he fell. I did not look down. I crouched by the rail. The crowd in the garden; Derek standing on the other balcony; the soldiers who now had appeared behind him—all were silent, and in the silence I heard the horrible thud of Rohbar's body as it struck....

I clung to Hope for an instant, and she shuddered against me. The scene broke again into chaos. I cast Hope away and leaped up. I stood at the balcony rail. My arms went up and gestured to Derek. Amazement was on his face, but he answered my gesture. Behind him the soldiers who had come to seize him were standing in a group, stricken at this new tragedy.

Derek swung on them. He was not powerless now! "Away with you!"

His cylinder menaced them, and they fell back in terror before him.

He darted past them and disappeared into the castle.

I felt Hope plucking at me. "I want to talk to the people."

She stood beside me, leaning over the rail. Gentle little figure. Familiar figure to them all. Their beloved Hope. Her voice rang out clearly through the hush.

"My people, we all want our beloved Alexandre—he has come back to us. He is our rightful king."

"King Alexandre! Long live King Alexandre!"

Derek in a moment appeared behind us. "My God, Charlie, I can't understand—"

I told him how I had done it. He gripped me. "I'll never be able to repay you for this!"

I pushed him forward and he joined Hope at the rail. Held her, and her arms went around his neck as she returned his kisses. The crowd gaped, then cheered.

I shouted, "Hope will be your queen—The reign of the crimson nobles is at an end!"

The wild cheering of the people, in which now the castle guards were joining, surged up to mingle with my words.

## CHAPTER XII - One Tumultuous Night

I COME now with very little more to record.

I returned to my own world. And Derek stayed in his. Each to his own; one may rail at this allotted portion—but he does not lightly give it up.

The scientists who have examined the mechanism with which I returned very naturally are skeptical of me. Derek feared a further communication between his world, and mine. He smiled his quiet smile.

"Your modern world is very aggressive, Charlie. I would not want to chance having my mechanism duplicated—a conquering army coming in here."

And so he adjusted the apparatus to carry me back and then go dead. I have wires and electrodes to show in support of my narrative. But since they will not operate I cannot blame my hearers for smiling in derision.

Yet there is some contributing evidence. Derek Mason has vanished. A watchman in an office building near Battery Park reports that at dawn of that June morning he heard splintering glass. He found the office door with its broken panel, and the ax lying on the hall floor. He even thinks he saw a ghost stretched out by the window. But he is laughed at for saying it.

And there is still another circumstance. If you will trouble to examine the newspaper files of that time, you will find an occurrence headed "Inexplicable Tragedy at Battery Park." You will read that near dawn that morning, the bodies of three men in crimson cloaks came hurtling down through the air and fell in the street near where several taxis were parked. Strange, unidentified men. Of extraordinary aspect. The flesh burned, perhaps. All three were dead; the bodies were mangled by falling some considerable height.



An inexplicable tragedy. Why should anyone believe that they were the three crimson nobles whom Derek attacked with his strange ray?

I am only Charles Wilson, clerk in a Wall Street brokerage office. If you met me, you would find me a very average, prosaic sort of fellow. You would never think that deeds of daring were in my line at all. Yet I have lived this one strange tumultuous night, and I shall always cherish the memory.