

WATERS
OF
WRATH

ARTHUR K. BARNES

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A Startling Complete Novelet

WATERS OF WRATH

By ARTHUR K. BARNES

*Author of "Day of the
Titans," "The Dual World,"
etc.*

When Future Greed Destroys the Rich Heritage of the Sea
Science Gives Humanity an Infinitely Richer Legacy!

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CHAPTER I

Sea Justice

The sleek anti-gravity rocket skimmed along at an even eight hundred miles per hour. It was painted with uneven blotches of blue and gray. This camouflage meant she was built for trouble. Right now the rocket ship was cruising northward, dangerously low over the surface of the open sea. This meant she was definitely looking for a fight.

In the glassite bow were three men. One was the chief pilot, Galen. The second was Dr. Myles, noted oceanographer, now acting as observer. But the control room was dominated by the tremendous presence of Jonathan Hardesty.

Like all Hardestys from time immemorial, the young man was well over six feet tall, massive as Gibraltar, a man of iron. Barely twenty-four years old, young Hardesty was two-fisted and grim. He had to be, he was owner-manager of the mighty Hardesty sea ranch, hundreds of thousands of acres of the richest portion of the sea. Young Hardesty was the thirty-first century equivalent of a feudal baron. He was tough. It was his only chance for survival.

A sharp exclamation from Dr. Myles brought Hardesty to the port observation station.

"There they are, ahead about two points off the port bow!"

Visibility had been poor, but was rapidly clearing as the Sun dispersed a late morning fog. Directly below the speeding rocket ship was the bright blue of the Gulf Stream, flowing across the Atlantic toward Europe. A hundred yards away was its edge, clearly marked by the line of darker water. Perhaps a half-mile farther, well into the dark waters, was the line of buoys that marked the extremity of the Hardesty sea ranch.

Hardesty moved with deliberation. He took Dr. Myles' glasses, picked up a faint cluster of activity on the sea's surface—a double burst of smoke.

"Right. This is the position that came in on Burton's SOS. Galen, rise and decelerate. Hover over them."

Galen moved the lever marked anti-gravity. The occupants of the ship felt a curious sickish sensation as weight was sharply decreased. The ship itself bobbed in the warm-air thermal rising from the water. Galen deftly moved levers and switches, skilfully jockeying several hundred feet higher. Flame spewed from the forward rockets.

Hardesty, clinging with one rock-like fist to a safety strap, peered down at the scene beneath.

"Dirty, murdering poachers," he said calmly.

Below was an ugly bit of thirty-first century range war, bloody and spiteful. Drifting soggily near the line of buoy markers was a speedy launch. It was painted with the famous black-and-gold Hardesty coat of arms, with the motto "*Per fortuem, per intelligentiam.*" It contained equipment for cleaning buoys and electrically testing the strength and condition of the retaining anchor lines. In the stern, holes had been smashed by explosive bullets. The launch was shipping water badly.

Inside Hardesty property, in the blue of the Gulf Stream itself, was a strange contraption. It was a sort of barge; squat, wide, and low in the water. On deck squatted two shacks. Between the warped boards of the largest, machinery could be glimpsed. An oversized flexible metal tube ran down into the water like the snout of some weird monster. A sizable pile of dully glistening powder spilled out of the larger shelter onto the deck.

This ramshackle extraction outfit, encrusted with salt, its metal parts corroded to the point of collapse, was a familiar sight along continental shores. They dotted coastal waters. Rickety affairs, often no more than a shack on a raft, they worked endlessly at their sea claims within easy distance of shelter in case of rough weather. This was the working capital of the men who tried, with insufficient money and equipment, to scrape a living from the sea.

A dozen of them stood on deck, guns and heat rays in their hands. Timing their shots with the rolling of the sea, they were blasting explosive shells at the Hardesty launch, trying to make hits below the water line. The others were laying down a heat ray barrage to keep Burton, the Hardesty line rider, in the shelter of the cockpit, where he could do no bailing.

The strategy was proving successful when young Hardesty's rocket drifted into position above the battle. Someone spotted it, yelled in sudden fright. Instantly all faces stared up at it.

"Give it to 'em, Boss," the pilot urged. Galen was a hard-bitten veteran of two wars and several expeditions into space, a scrapper at the drop of a helmet.

"Wait," said Hardesty, stepping to the loudspeaker mike. Presently his voice roared out metallically to those below. "Attention, you thieves down there! Lay down your arms and surrender, and you will receive fair trial. Fight, and you'll get what all trespassers and murderers deserve!"

For the space of a dozen heartbeats there was poised silence, while the upward gaping gang of poachers gathered their wits. Intermittently came the muted *pow* of a rocket blast as the almost weightless ship maintained its altitude. Then the hull rang sharply as a miniature HE shell exploded dangerously near the observation bow. Action burst out on the barge deck. It was war, swift, merciless, bitter.

Shells, and rays hammered at the Hardesty ship in a desperate attempt to put it out of commission in one quick thrust.

The attempt failed. Galen's fingers were, steady, darting with amazing agility over the bank of controls. The ship dodged aside, swooped up, ducked into the high fog. When it came down again, Hardesty's proton cannon was blasting furiously.

Three men were caught flat-footed, trying to swing the muzzle of an ancient anti-aircraft gun into action. They wilted, slumped in smoking heaps of tortured flesh.

Then, like a terrier routing out rats, the AG's proton stream prowled over the sizzling deck while the frantic poachers scattered in panic. Some of them darted for the companionway into the hold. But Hardesty anticipated that move. He sprayed the opening with an unending stream of sub-atomic bullets. The companionway exploded, spattering red-hot metal and free energy all over the boat.

From then on it was no contest. The battle was soon over, with the survivors waving a white flag. Young Hardesty stepped away from the gun and leaned against the wall. He looked faintly sick. Dr. Myles spoke with sympathetic understanding.

"Nasty job, youngster, but it has to be done."

Galen, the old warrior, grunted in disappointment.

"They give up too easy. They knowed what they was riskin' when they snuck into our waters. Shoulda been ready to fight it out. The breed's gettin' soft. Now I mind, in your dad's time, when them fellers'd make regular poachin' forays onto the Stream every month or so. Sometimes we'd spot 'em, sometimes not. When we did, they allus put up a good scrap while they was tryin' to get away. Sometimes they made it. Sometimes they didn't. But nowadays? Faugh! They're just plain sneaks." The ship gently descended to a precise landing by the poachers' barge. Hardesty and Dr. Myles stepped onto the deck to examine the ragged crew. Aside from the two leaders, they were typical "bowlies," with the strange, bewildered look common to most of them. Deep in their eyes was the pain of having been uprooted, and harried by circumstance into a strange occupation, on a strange element.

They were not men of the sea. Most of them had never turned a furrow. Many had to trace their ancestry back hundreds of years before they could find the last farmer in their family. Nevertheless the soil was in their blood. They were born to be dirt-farmers, not homeless tramps on a treacherous and unfamiliar sea.

Even their nickname, "bowlies," indicated this truth. It was a corruption of an expression that had its origin hundreds of years before. The Dust Bowl, spreading like a cancerous blot over central North America, had driven the farmers from their worthless land.

With only the coastal regions arable, most of them had been forced to turn to the wealth of the sea for their livelihood. But they could not finance large-scale activity, and had no particular talent for marine mining or cultivation. Foredoomed to miserable failure, they were a lost legion.

Hardesty sternly smothered the sympathy stirring in him. The code of the sea-holder was kill or be killed. One sign of weakness and the jackal pack would swiftly overthrow the system of mighty sea ranches. Iron control, ruthless, summary justice meted out to all invaders—those were the price of existence.

He turned to the two leaders and felt satisfaction. This was the type he didn't mind dealing with. They were snarling, belligerent.

"Nasty customers, eh? What's your name?"

"Sam White, tha's who I am," one of the bearded leaders snapped. "An' you ain't got no right to treat us like this. It's oppression, that's what. The sea belongs to the people. Greatest good for the greatest number. It ain't right for guys like you to grab all the best waters while guys like us have to starve—"

Hardesty ignored the poacher and went to the pile of powdery crystals that had spilled from the extraction shed.

"What's the verdict here, Doctor?" he asked the oceanographer.

Dr. Myles scooped up a handful, sniffed and tasted the stuff.

"Mostly potassium and manganese, some iodine. Their separator is in disrepair, judging from the amount of salt still remaining.... I would say your new acquaintances have been squatting here at least three days. It's a fairly profitable haul they have here."

Together the two men peered into the smaller shack.

"As I expected," murmured Myles. "An Alvan Processor." This was the marvelous apparatus which increased manifold the surface tension and density of the surrounding water. The ship so equipped could ride out the roughest storms in comparative safety. Only two classes of sea miners could afford this expensive machine—those with capital, and thieves.

Just then the Hardesty launch scraped against the side of the barge. Galen had brought in Burton, the line rider. He was just a kid, pale from excitement and loss of blood. His left arm hung in bloody tatters.

"They—they were operating in the fog, sir. Musta heard me coming before I heard them. So they shut off their engines and ambushed me. Sorry—I—" He lurched, almost fell.

Hardesty caught him and carried him gently to the rocket ship. When he stepped back to the barge deck, his jaw was set hard. His eyes were grim as he sought out the two leaders of the poaching gang.

"That makes it just so much tougher for you birds. Pile into the ship, the whole mob of you. You're going to get a taste of real sea justice.... Galen, you can tame this valiant little army who tackled young Burton in the face of such tremendous odds. Give 'em a touch of the paralysis ray, enough to keep 'em quiet till we get back home.... Dr. Myles, I think we might confiscate this stuff and give it to some charitable organization, before sinking the barge."

He turned back to the poachers, saw they still stood uncertainly.

"Well!" he roared at them. "Get going! You're not dead yet—not quite yet."

They jumped, scuttling toward the rocket's open port. The voluble leader with social inequality ideas went pale at Hardesty's reminder. The penalty for theft and assault on the high seas was the same that had been meted to pirates since time immemorial,—death!

"We ain't worried," he retorted. "Things are gonna be different around here pretty soon. You guys won't act so high-handed no more."

CHAPTER II

Judy Vance Enters

Young Hardesty sent the leader scurrying into the rocket ship. Dr. Myles transferred the stolen minerals to the hold of the AG.

Galen lifted the ship above the doomed vessel and hovered there while Hardesty aimed the cannon. A ravening stream of protons plowed down through the heart of the barge.

Smoke-and flame quickly burst out. Metal reddened and fell inward as the ray bored deeper. Internal explosions racked the squat hull. The rising column of smoke turned to hissing steam when the sea poured in through a gaping hole in her bottom. The bow lurched high in the air in a spasm of death agony. Creamy bubbles marked her grave, and these turned black when the inevitable oil slick rose to the surface.

Before Hardesty could give the command to fly homeward, another rocket ship came into view. Rapidly it approached the site of the recent battle, now marked only by the drifting launch. It was an old Flamingo amphibian, a cheap, mass production affair. Its original crimson paint job was almost obliterated. Two of the after portholes were covered over with rusty sheet metal instead of glassite. Hardesty watched the new arrival with hard-faced wariness.

"On your toes, Galen. If this punk is looking for trouble, we wouldn't want to disappoint him."

Galen grinned. The Flamingo circled widely about the area at low altitude, came to rest on the sea near the launch. The tele-screen in the Hardesty ship buzzed and the warning light blinked peremptorily.

"The punk wants words with us," Hardesty observed, snapping the switch which opened communication between the two ships.

On the screen flashed the image of a girl. She was tall, slender, with flaming red hair. Its soft and expert disarray gave a wind-tousled effect. For a moment the young giant said nothing, and with reason. The girl was enough to take any man's breath. Her angry eyes stared hotly.

"I suppose you're Hardesty."

Hardesty's slow, irritating smile spread across his face.

"I suppose I am. And may I ask to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"I'm Judy Vance." She had words to say and meant to dominate the interview.

"Oh, yes. I've heard of you. Supposed to be the leader of the bowlies, crusading for the bowlies, against the cruel and arrogant 'moneyed interests,' who take sadistic delight in grinding the poor."

Judy Vance made a visible effort to restrain her temper. "I am the bowlies' leader—"

"Then you're a rotten leader," interrupted Hardesty. "You encourage your followers to skulking thievery and cowardly assault. You must know what the penalty is."

The girl whitened in startling contrast to her hair.

"You mean you've already destroyed the entire crew of—"

"Not yet. They're in my ship. One of them's been entertaining us with some of your second-hand, shop-worn social theories. Don't worry. They'll get a fair trial."

"Fair trial! With Hardesty the court, Hardesty laws, Hardesty the prosecutor, and Hardesty the jury! Is that your idea of a fair trial? It's nothing but a sop to your conscience, a wicked effort to legalize murder. Oh, I'm not arguing for Sam White or his ilk. It's the genuine bowlies that I'm fighting for. They're not criminals. They've been made so desperate by poverty that they'll listen to any sort of proposition. You can't condemn them!"

As Hardesty watched the girl, he felt a strange emotion surging within him. Ire, he decided. In an annoyed tone, he replied,

"Lady, our laws around here are harsh, but they're just. Everyone knows it. Your playmates knew what they risked

when they started plundering the Hardesty sea ranch.... I'm sorry, but we have a man aboard in need of medical attention —"

He paused. The girl was laughing. It was without humor, a forced, vengeful sort of laugh.

"You find this amusing?" Hardesty asked.

"I just remembered," Judy Vance said. "You'll never have time to render your warped ideas of justice on those men. You don't know it yet, Mister Hardesty, but you're through as a little tin god."

Hardesty's jaw jutted. "There never was a Hardesty who shivered at a threat!" Savagely he slapped the switch that turned the screen dark. Someone snickered; Hardesty whirled to see Dr. Myles hide a smile.

"So you find something funny, too?"

"Sort of. Miss Vance got under your skin, didn't she?"

"Nothing of the kind. She's just an impudent upstart who needs to be put in her place." He reddened as he remembered how they had shouted at one another with embarrassing lack of dignity. "But it's odd," he puzzled while the AG sped homeward. "That's the second hint we've had of something about to happen. Wonder what she meant...."

He soon found out. The instant Hardesty City loomed over the horizon—a mighty pontoon city like a copper jewel on

the bright blue ribbon of the Gulf Stream—young Hardesty knew there was trouble.

On the spreading tarmac by the ocean's edge were five palatial rocket yachts. The gigantic ships had every scientific device known to mankind for safe and luxurious travel even through space. Their distinctive color designs told Hardesty whom they belonged to—the world's five greatest sea-holders, other than Hardesty himself. They dominated the ocean's most desirable currents, the Gulf Stream and the Japan Current. Only a matter of gravest importance could have brought them together.

Sensing a crisis, old Galen expertly piloted the AG into a landing.

"Myles an' me'll take care of Burton an' the prisoners," he offered. "You scoot along an' find out what's up."

Hardesty nodded and jumped out. His personal surface car was waiting. He piled in and tromped on the accelerator. He shot off like a lightning bolt toward the center of the City.

His course took him first through the orderly rows of his workers' copper-coated cottages. These gave way to the long, low buildings housing the vast scientific enterprises that were Hardesty City's reason for existence.

The Hardesty sea ranch was not a prospecting venture, nor a fly-by-night outfit, trying to make a quick profit before moving on to more fertile areas. It was Big Business on a tremendous scale. Huge extraction plants methodically

removed and purified the valuable minerals of the sea—potash, bromine, manganese, iodine, and many others.

A large saltern, working only at rare intervals, turned enough salt out to supply all Hardesty City's workers for weeks. Another series of buildings housed the unit that recovered valuable chemicals and medicinal drugs. There were few known chemicals which they could not find in the water, the sediment, or the marine life of the sea.

Just beyond, jets of steam marked the ceaseless endeavor of the giant plant which distilled pure water from the ocean brine. There was also the machinery which utilized the steady current to generate practically cost-free electricity, cheaper by far than atomic power.

But these activities represented only a part of the entire enterprise. A sharp right turn brought Hardesty's speeding car in sight of the other and equally important work. The greatest wealth of the sea, as the Hardestys and their kind early learned, was not to be found in its mineral resources but in its natural productivity. Countless species of animals and plants of commercial importance grew there abundantly.

Much of Hardesty City's suburbs were devoted to the pursuit of aquiculture. Only the top few inches of soil are productive. But plants can be grown in sea water to a depth limited only by the penetration of sunlight—two hundred to eight hundred feet. No dry spells, frost, insects, could ruin

the crops. Scientific progress had made the sea more productive per unit than dry land.

Instead of being forced to eat spinach, the people in Hardesty City got their vitamins and essential food elements from over a hundred delectable marine plants. They raised Irish moss, green laver, dulse, seatron, kombu, anomori, kijiki, arame, and murlins.

Hardesty tooted his speedster into the heart of town, where the low tower of Hardesty House loomed above the surrounding buildings. He whipped into the parking space, shut off the motor, and made swiftly for the private elevator entrance which led to his penthouse. The Sun was setting, and lights were beginning to blossom in the Marine Room.

Famous the world over as a rendezvous for tourists and sophisticates, Hardesty House made additional profit for its shrewd management by catering to the most exacting gourmets. Its sea-food dinners, featuring fish, marine plants and shellfish specially developed by the Hardesty marine biologists, were unmatched anywhere on the globe.

Five men awaited his pleasure in that penthouse. Though each was older than he by far, they all turned as if to a recognized leader when he entered the living room.

Sir Cecil Harwicke, patriarch of them all at the age of a hundred and thirty-seven, James Jonson, Rousseau, the fiery Frenchman—these three, with Hardesty, controlled the entire Gulf Stream from Caribbean to Arctic Ocean. Chiang Wu

Sen and T. Yamada, leading figures in the United Orient, dominated the Japan Current. All five were badly worried.

"Been waiting for you, Hardesty," was Jonson's brusque greeting. "Heard the news?"

"No. Been away a few days, checking the outlying districts of the ranch. What's up?"

Characteristically none of them wasted time in formalities. They were blunt, hard men who understood and respected one another.

"Just this. An International Sea Claim Commission has been set up. One member from each nation in the Northern Hemisphere whose population is affected by sea mining and aquiculture. Has the power to pass on the validity of all sea claims. Obviously the business is just a stooge for the bowlies and similar groups from other countries. Under domination of crackpots like that Vance she-devil."

"It is a plot of the most abominable!" burst out Rousseau, unable to contain himself. "A scheme underhanded to smash us, break up our ranches, to allow those hordes to sate themselves in one grand orgy of mining on our richest-holdings! It is—it is—" He stopped, spluttering indignantly.

Jonson pointed through the open doorway into Hardesty's private office. On the desk stood Hardesty's personal message receiver. It operated on an extension of the stock

ticker principle, with its tiny spool of film holding a message. Above it a red light burned, till the message was removed from the machine.

"That's a summons," Jonson said, "to a hearing by the new Commission. To determine whether the continuation of our sea ranches is contrary to public interest. If so, they're to be broken up and opened to mining claims by individuals. Meantime, exercise of our local law on trespassers and poachers is forbidden. Hearing to be held in New York next week. Submit briefs and argument then."

Hardesty's eyes were granite. "Just like that, eh?"

"Just like that ... Looks like those bowlies have someone smart enough to whip up a lot of political pressure against us. The squeeze is directed against us on the Atlantic. Chiang and Yamada aren't in on this because there's no demand from Orientals to break up their estates. But—"

"But we fear the establishment of a dangerous precedent," interjected Yamada sibilantly.

"Exactly. Question is, what's our move?"

"Just sit tight," decided Hardesty. "Attend the hearing, present our side of the case. If the Commission proves to be a bunch of crooks paid to legislate against us, or if they're just plain dumb, then we may have to go into action. But till the decision is actually handed down, our play is to do nothing."

CHAPTER III

End of a Dynasty

The I.S.C.C. hearing was held in a bare little room, in a high tower overlooking the incredible engineering fairyland that was thirty-first century Manhattan. Just a handful of people were there, less than a score of witnesses to the brief, shocking drama.

Only one newscaster was permitted, but his apparatus was tuned to a world-wide hook-up. Millions of watchers would be clustered around public and private televisors, hanging on every word and gesture in that courtroom.

The law was streamlined in that age. There were no legal tangles, no endless jousting of lawyers or confusion of issues. It would be a simple statement of the case by accredited spokesmen for the two contending groups, bowlies *versus* wealthy sea-holders. There would be no appeal.

Hardesty met Judy Vance in that room just before the hearing began. She gazed at him with a maddeningly superior expression, already savoring triumph.

"Remember what I told you a few days ago?"

Hardesty fought down a hot reply, angry with himself that this girl could stir him so to fury.

"I remember," he said coldly. "But the last card is not yet played in this game."

A gavel rapped, and a clerk intoned the circumstances surrounding the issue in question. Judy Vance was called upon to state the bowlies' arguments.

"This is not merely a class war," the girl stated after submitting her written brief. "It is a fight for the right to existence itself—the right of every man to share in some measure the wealth of the Earth."

Deftly, with the skill and passion of a natural orator, she turned back history's pages six hundred years. The gigantic American Dust Bowl and its smaller counterpart in Europe had begun to spread from its original boundaries like some malignant disease. In a hundred years' time it had spread from Rockies to Appalachians. The land was worthless, arid, unfertile. Thousands of farmers were driven from their homes.

Then came the fabulous "sea-rush" of 2507, brought about by the simultaneous development of two inventions. One was the Alvan Process machine. The other was the Dobbs Extractor, which enabled men to remove the mineral wealth of the sea cheaply and profitably. For a time the bowlies found livelihood as they turned to the sea, staking claims all along the continental coasts and even out toward mid-ocean.

The Golden Age of Industry followed in the twenty-sixth century, brought on by the rapid development of space travel and consequent demand for all minerals and chemicals that

could be found in the seas. The lost legion of the bowlies found security for a time.

"But it did not last," continued the girl in her intense voice. "Gradually the mineral wealth of the oceans became depleted during five hundred years of steady extraction. Prices dropped. It has now come to such a state that there are only meager profits to be scraped out from sea mining. The bowlies are once again the legion of the poor.

"It's not a question of complete exhaustion of minerals. That, of course, is impossible. But in the static portions of the sea, the mineral content has been so reduced that there are no longer any sure profits for small-scale operators. The bowlies' sea-claims have been worked out."

That brought Judy Vance to the main point of her argument. During the original rush, the Hardestys, Jonsons, and their kind, with great wealth at their command, staked out tremendous sea ranches on the Gulf Stream. These remained intact over five hundred years, situated on the richest part of the ocean. This was true partly because the steady current permitted generation of cost-free power. The warmer waters were also much more suited to aquiculture. But the Gulf Stream brought a constantly renewed stream of rich water from its Caribbean source.

There was no extensive sea mining in the Caribbean. To begin with, the Stream there was also a Hardesty property

and was kept reasonably clear of any such activity. But more important, it was in the hurricane belt. Meteorological changes in the last three centuries had increased the frequency of violent hurricane. Any large-scale attempts at mining, therefore, would find their investment completely wiped out every few weeks. A thousand Alvan Processors could not withstand the fury of the contemporary hurricane.

"So that's the situation today," cried Judy Vance indignantly. "Thousands of us face starvation, while a handful of wealthy individuals control vast stretches of the sea. Those waters would mean a decent living for all. If these great ranches were being utilized, I would be silent. But it is a fact that less than five per cent of the sea ranches are under actual use. The rest is untouched, going to waste, instead of giving some poor devils presentable clothing and proper food.

"That, gentlemen, we contend is a social oppression. No man has the right to deny others the privilege of comfort and honest, lucrative employment. Whatever benefit the sea-holders may once have been in a pioneering sense, they've now outlived their usefulness. It's a social crime to permit them to exist in the light of present-day conditions. The ranches should—be—dissolved—now!"

Judy Vance's vibrant tones filled the chamber long, after the conclusion of her impassioned speech. At last there was tense quiet as the nine judges conferred briefly. The Chief Commissioner, whose calm face had expressed nothing during the entire hearing, presently turned to Hardesty.

"You will present your case now, please."

Young Hardesty stepped up to tender his brief. The burden of preserving intact the labor of hundreds of years weighed heavily upon him. He was no public speaker. His dry dispassionate tones were a marked contrast to the girl's dramatic appeal.

"We, too, have our traditions," he began quietly. "They are as old as those of our opponents and, I think, just as noble. But I will not bore you with a recitation of them. I feel the subject is not pertinent. I might also remind the Commission of our long and honorable record of public service. The seaholders, in the days before rocket clippers completely superseded ocean-going ships, kept the shipping lanes open.

"They established free meteorological stations in mid-ocean to aid Government weather forecasters. They advanced oceanography and related scientific research immeasurably. In many ways they have been of help to mankind. But that, too, is not germane to the issue. The single point in question is whether the existence of the big sea ranches is to the public interest."

Young Hardesty paused, looked searchingly at the lovely girl.

"Miss Vance seems to think we are at opposite poles. In reality, our cause is one. For the Hardestys, the Jonsons, the

Harwickes, and the others, have always been fully conscious of the obligation of Wealth—to preserve, not to despoil. Miss Vance points out that we work only five per cent of our holdings, but that is not waste. It is intelligent, planned conservation.

"By her own tongue, Miss Vance convicts her kind of ruthless exploitation. Five hundred years ago there was plenty for all. Now there is little, except where it has been conserved. The fate of the whale and the sea otter, the forests, the oil deposits, and mines of Earth, will be repeated if thousands of small operators are permitted to run rampant over the last remaining areas that are still rich.

"Gentlemen." Hardesty's grim voice took on swift urgency. "Heedless exploitation of the Gulf Stream will dump an oversupply of minerals on the world market. It will knock down prices to ruinous lows. It will smash the economic system that is based upon the mining of the sea. The consequent upheaval will have incalculable results. And Miss Vance, instead of benefiting her kind, will have completed their own ruination."

That marked the end of the starkly simple trial. Hardesty and his colleagues returned to their hotel suites, to await the final decision. Three days they passed in torment, sleepless, their tempers constantly ragged.

When the message finally came, Chiang and Rousseau were out to dinner. The others were in Hardesty's room. Jonson burst in with tragedy naked in his eyes. Hardesty

slowly stood up and the two men stared at each other in silence.

"So we've lost," said Hardesty, before the other could blurt his news.

"The fools!" raged Jonson. "The dumb, blind bureaucrats! They've legislated us out of existence and smashed a whole economic system! Just like that—with not even so much as thinking of the results. Well, it won't be without a fight, I can tell you that. There'll be a lot o' blood shed before any Jonson gets wiped out."

Hardesty felt a hard knot slowly forming in the pit of his stomach. He had a sudden comprehensive vision of those thousands upon thousands of Dobbs Extractors sucking relentlessly at the water. Day and night, for all the weeks and months and years that went to make up five centuries, they drained even the limitless wealth of the sea. Those heavily worked coastal areas had quickly been stripped to an unprofitable level. They would make short work of the Gulf Stream.

Although it had been a possibility, Hardesty had never really believed that any group of commissioners could be so stupid as to rule against the sea-holders. But it had come, at last—the end of an era, the fall of a dynasty....

Hardesty turned, aware that someone had spoken to him. It was Jonson, still raving in his fury.

"Fight?" asked Hardesty. "Against the combined military forces of nine nations? It could end only in one way, with lives thrown—"

"Well, what're you going to do?" snarled Jonson. "Quit?" He pointed to the tiny coat of arms embroidered on Hardesty's singlet. "By intelligence. By courage. Lot o' good that'll do you now! I tell you, the only thing is to go down fighting! Maybe if we put up a stiff front they'll change their tune a bit."

But Hardesty was not listening to the argument that now raged bitterly. He was staring abstractedly out the window, his brain churning. The uproar died down. Sir Cecil, who rarely spoke, cleared his throat.

"It seems that the Hardesty intelligence is still functioning, and is giving birth to an idea. Perhaps the lion is not yet pulled down by jackals."

Hardesty whirled. "Maybe. Now look." He turned to a Mercator's Projection map on the wall. His finger described the clockwise circle of the Japan Current from Hawaii up the Oriental coast, east under the Aleutian Islands, and down the American coast. "From Hawaii to the Aleutians, the ascending current is yours and Chiang's, eh, Yamada?"

"That is so," hissed the Japanese in agreement.

"And you're not affected by the order as yet."

"True. The western Americans have use of the Current, somewhat depleted but nonetheless comparatively rich, as it descends the Pacific Coast. As for our side of the Pacific—" Yamada shrugged. "The Oriental races do not have the insolence to assault their betters."

That was true. There would be no demands from the United Orient to divide the Chiang or Yamada sea-holdings. Subservience was too long, inbred. Besides, small Oriental sea miners could still make what they considered livelihoods because of their age-long low living standards.

Hardesty smiled. "You needn't worry about us asking you and Chiang to divvy up with us. That wouldn't be cricket. Anyhow, my idea'll make that unnecessary."

He strode to the private viso-phone, called Hardesty City on a tight beam. Within thirty seconds he was talking earnestly to Dr. Myles, outlining his scheme, asking questions, checking possibilities and difficulties with the oceanographer.

As the others listened, their eyes grew wider when they grasped the tremendous scope of Hardesty's plan. Then their eyes sparkled as they contemplated its shrewdness. Finally Hardesty broke the connection and turned to his friends.

"Well, you heard Myles say it might be done. What do you think?"

Rousseau had returned with Chiang during the conversation.

"It is a plan of the most astounding, my friend," he said reverently. "Of an epic scope. Truly worthy of a Hardesty. I, Rousseau, say it."

Harwicke chuckled wickedly. "Colossal, my boy. I think we are all agreed on that. Only Jonson will feel some disappointment at missing his beloved fight."

Hardesty grinned oddly at Jonson.

"Stick by me, fella. You may get a scrap yet. Only it'll be on our terms and on our battlefield."

CHAPTER IV

Hardesty's Plan

Once more they met—the Commission, Judy Vance, Hardesty and his colleagues. Miss Vance was already in the hearing room when Hardesty arrived. When they came together, Hardesty felt, the familiar surge of emotion.

"Good Lord," he thought. "How I hate that girl!"

They said not a word to each other. Surprisingly Judy Vance did not gloat. With victory hers, she seemed inclined to sympathy rather than overbearing triumph. But Hardesty

gave her no chance to speak. He addressed the Commission without preamble.

"You gentlemen have ruled against us. We have two choices—submission or bloody war. If we submit tamely without the loss of thousands of lives, the Commission must permit us to submit on our own terms."

The Chief Commissioner nodded. "We realize you have a billion-dollar investment and that we cannot legally expropriate it without compensation. Nor do we wish a bloody and useless fight. If you and your friends can suggest a reasonable solution, the Commission will gladly aid in its accomplishment."

"Very well. In exchange for our Atlantic Gulf Stream holdings, give us absolute title, with an irrevocable agreement, to worthless holdings of the same extent. We want the Arctic Ocean along the coast of Alaska and around the north Canadian Coast to Hudson Bay. Also the Bering Sea, of course."

The Chief Commissioner blinked. It was a surprising offer. Those northern waters were frozen solid most of the year, totally unfit for aquiculture, and expensive even for mineral extraction. He turned to Judy Vance.

"Surely your party would not object to this?"

No objection. Judy Vance, as Hardesty had counted on, graciously played the role of magnanimous victor.

"In order to transfer our establishments from one ocean to another, it will be necessary to dig a canal," he said. "The almost perpetual storms around Cape Horn preclude using that route. It would be equally impossible to reach Alaska by pushing through the north Atlantic and the frozen Arctic. Therefore, a canal through Guatemala will be required. Will the Commission undertake to guarantee us perpetual ownership of the proper amount of Guatemalan territory?"

The Commission conferred briefly. Obviously they were elated at such an easy solution of what might have been a nasty problem.

"Though no representative of the Republic of Guatemala is present, we feel there will be no obstacles to such an arrangement." The Chief Commissioner struggled not to register doubtful curiosity. "Do you really think you can dig a satisfactory canal clear through Guatemala?"

"Gentlemen, leave that to us. One hundred and eighty-five miles long, one mile wide, and one hundred and fifty feet deep. It shall be done."

The six billionaires wheeled like a military phalanx and marched to the door. As they passed Judy Vance, she caught Hardesty's glance. His face might have been carved from stone. But there was something deep in his eyes. It was the look of a man who has just drawn and filled a royal flush.

Within six months of incredible scientific research and construction—which strained even the resources of Hardesty, Jonson, Rousseau, and Harwicke—they were ready. A half-mile inland from ancient Puerto Cortes, in Guatemala, were a row of enormous mechanical moles, mounted on caterpillar treads. There were twenty of them, spaced so that from end to end the line stretched one mile. They were aimed at the ground. The tremendous project had been organized with a minimum of publicity. Still, people from all parts of the world were gathered to see its initiation. Hardesty's men, reinforced by International Police, were keeping them back from range of the excavators. Only a few men were inside the restricted space—the machine operators, a few officials, and Hardesty and his friends. Behind a protective shield, Hardesty was explaining to the I.S.C.C. commissioners.

"It's the development of a small invention of Dr. Myles, my oceanographer, and Dr. Conway, my head physicist. They worked out a borer that would rapidly probe the sea bottom to considerable depths. It simply collapses the atoms of soil, rock, or metal. What's left is a hole, of course. It has long been suspected that the character of the omnipresent ether may be subject to change. This theory is the only one which accounts for several otherwise unexplainable physical phenomena.

"Dr. Conway's digger proves this to be fact. It emits a radiation which materially increases the density of the ether. This slows down the speed of every electron within its field, resulting in their taking up new and smaller orbits. The end result is collapse."

He signaled. The excavator men scattered to their respective machines, clambered into lead-protected cockpits. The whine of atomic motors filled the air. Another signal, and all twenty batteries emitted waves of radiation. A great cry arose from the distant watchers on the hills and those hovering recklessly close in helicopters and rocket cars.

The Earth itself seemed to be disintegrating before their very eyes. Soil and rock collapsed wherever those rays struck, compressing instantaneously to form an extremely firm flooring. Over it the advancing tractors moved easily. A great blaze of heat and light drove Hardesty and the officials behind the shield.

"Great release of energy," shouted Hardesty. "Mostly in the form of light, heat and X-rays. This occurs because the electrons in each atom are going from an outer to an inner energy level."

The mighty machines moved forward relentlessly, the muzzles of their "guns" pointed downward to dig a slanting path. When they reached a point one hundred and fifty feet below sea level, their course leveled off. The Earth appeared to crumble, settle, and dissolve before their blasts.

"So long as we don't have to annihilate any mountains," cried Hardesty above the clamor, "we can dig about as fast as the tractors can move. By paralleling closely the southeastern Guatemalan border, we meet only one narrow range, not too high. Slow and ticklish work there, but we'll make it. We can regulate the effective distance of the radiation up to an

ultimate of four hundred yards. When we tackle the mountains, we can work from a safe distance."

The Commissioners shook their heads and muttered dazedly. It was a project calculated to stun any mind, yet this young man Hardesty was apparently taking it in stride.

Back in the North Atlantic, another tremendous task was going forward under the direction of Dr. Myles. Hardesty City and the other three similar developments were systematically being broken up into maneuverable units.

Old Galen again had his favorite AG rocket moving with incredible precision along predetermined geometrical patterns above the City. His proton cannons were blasting. Though he was blinded by tears, he would entrust to no one else the duty of slashing apart the mighty pontoon city which had been his home for many years. That delicate job was only for a master hand.

Below, the extraction plants, distilleries, and generators all were silenced. Equipment was being stowed away for the long journey. All production activities had ended. Workmen busily installed atomic motors and Alvan Processors to each unit of the broken city.

Finally after months of furious labor, all was ready for the Great Pilgrimage. From Guatemala came reports that the

canal, at the cost of two hundred lives, had been completed. The seas were joined!

So Hardesty City began its fantastic hegira, piece by piece. There was an aura of weird unreality about it all, as if gigantic motion picture sets were being moved into place. Down the coast of eastern America they moved with awkward majesty. Then a quick dash across the Caribbean was executed before any devastating hurricanes could reach them in their defenseless condition.

Through the canal and up the endless Pacific Coast they sailed, hugging the shore line. Two violent storms attacked them, but each time the Alvan Processors calmed the seas. Nearby headlands protected them somewhat from winds which might have capsized an ungainly strip of buildings higher than it was wide.

Eventually the strange procession slipped safely through the Aleutian Islands and into the Arctic. One by one of the piecemeal cities took their new positions. First, Hardesty's was set up in the Bering Sea, then Rousseau's, Jonson's, and finally Sir Cecil's.

Harwicke found himself far around toward Hudson Bay when he gave the order to drop anchor and weld the city. Only because it was late in an unusually mild Arctic summer had the expedition been able to penetrate those Arctic waters without mishap.

When the tremendous salt-water trek was finally accomplished, the entire world applauded the brilliance of

the achievement. Hardesty was regarded not only as benefactor to suffering humanity, but as a genius and leader without peer. This gave Hardesty some moments of bitter amusement.

"I've done those poor bowlies a service, all right. I've saved them from themselves, only they don't realize it yet. Wait and hear what they call me next spring, When the new sea-rush begins. Just wait!"

Spring, 3040, was at hand. With it came the greatest peacetime event of economic significance within the memory of living man. The second sea-rush was about to begin. The Gulf Stream was open to public claim.

Young Hardesty and Thomas Jonson, with Dr. Myles and Galen in the main Hardesty rocket ship, were watching the tele-cast of this epochal occurrence. The scene was the northern shore of America. It was packed like sardines with sea-going craft of every conceivable nature.

"Thousands of boats, rockets, sea-sleds, and even powered metalrafts, folks," cried the announcer's excited voice. "They're all waiting for the signal that'll start them in the race for the choicest positions of the fabulously rich Gulf Stream. Months have been devoted to the selection of those permitted to enter this race. Only the genuinely poor bowlies can compete. Rich operators trying to enter dummy competitors

have been carefully weeded out. There'll be no chisellers here today.

"Claims will be staked according to custom by a buoy, and will be half a mile square. Each buoy has a Government-sealed, untamperable timepiece, which starts only when the buoy is anchored firmly on the chosen spot. Future arguments as to priority, then, will be quickly settled.

"Ordinarily, of course, open-sea mining would be impossible for these people. It's been made feasible, however, by two things. First, the Stream will afford cost-free power to operate the necessary Alvan Processors. And secondly, the Government will provide Processors, on long-term loans, to all successful claimants."

The speaker continued to describe the picture. He blurted out the local color, the background of centuries leading up to this moment. He compared the present event with the Oklahoma Indian Territory land rush.

"It's an unusual year in more ways than one, folks. Europe is just digging out from her severest winter in two decades. So far there have been no bird migrations to speak of. And there've been rumors about peculiar behavior of the Gulf Stream. These are only rumors, of course, since the Stream has been absolutely closed to any traffic since departure of the sea-holders. Still, it seems almost as if nature herself was trying to record this great—"

There was a simultaneous roar of many cannons, from near and far.

"That's it! The signal! And there they go!"

The television screen showed a madhouse sight as thousands of eager racers drove straight out to sea with a single-minded purpose. Many never surmounted the first line of breakers. It was dog-eat-dog and devil take the hindmost. Bitter fights broke out every minute, when racers collided in the jam. If some unfortunate went under, few would stop and help.

Coast Guard helicopters dipped and fluttered. Rescues by the dozen were made.

Just within range of the telecaster was a rickety amphibian rocket. Someone had managed to rent the old ship on his prospects of locating a rich claim. Before it was a quarter of a mile off-shore, it blew up. Life and hope alike were swallowed by the sea. Hardesty tuned the scene out.

"Not pretty, is it?"

No one, spoke for awhile. Then Jonson ventured a choked remark.

"It won't be long now."

"Yes," Hardesty agreed. "We'll know one way or the other in a few hours. Hell is about to pop!"

CHAPTER V

Defeat Is Triumph

The hours ticked away. Hardesty sat calmly reading. But Jonson paced nervously from port to port, staring out at the Guatemalan jungle on one side, or watching the smooth flow of water in the huge canal on the other. Dr. Myles tried to play cards with Galen.

When the private viso-phone buzzed its sharp call signal, everyone jumped. Hardesty pushed the switch. The face of Judy Vance sprang to furious life. Her eyes were blazing, with alarm as much as anger. Without a moment's hesitation she and Hardesty were shouting again at one another.

"You thieving, doublecrossing crook!" the girl cried. "You —"

"You ignorant red-headed firebrand!" Hardesty yelled. "I did it for your own good, to keep you from ruining your own crowd. If you only had the sense of an eight-year-old, you'd appreciate—"

"Your cheating has driven them crazy! I can't do a thing with them!"

For a moment both voices screamed together in angry epithets. Then Hardesty slammed the screen to darkness again. He turned, apologetic.

"That girl makes me forget myself. I never met anyone I so thoroughly detest.... Well, what's so funny?"

Dr. Myles smothered a grin and discreetly said nothing. The call buzzer rattled again, several times. This time it was the I.S.C.C. chief.

"Ah," murmured Jonson. "Here it comes at last. The Great Stone Face seems to be slightly upset."

Indeed, the usual calm demeanor of the Chief Commissioner was wiped away in an expression of dazed, bewildered astonishment.

"Hardesty!" he bleated. "What's happened out here?"

"Your blunderingly idiotic Commission ruled us out of the Atlantic Gulf Stream. At the same time they practically guaranteed economic ruin for the people you wanted to help. So we took it into our own hands to save you from your folly. Dr. Myles, here, will explain what has been done."

Myles stepped before the screen.

"The Gulf Stream makes its clockwise circle of the Caribbean, gathering its cargo of riches. Protected from exploitation by continual hurricanes, it caroms off the Guatemalan coast at the precise point where the Hardesty Canal now begins. Hence, the Stream now divides. Half of it, three million cubic feet per second, drives straight through the peninsula to join the Japan Current.

"This augmented Japan Current is now so powerful that it no longer is turned completely by the Aleutian Islands. Instead, it also divides, half of the warm stream shooting on up the Alaskan coast and around toward Hudson Bay. Those formerly frozen waters are now ice-free the year around. The temperature of the already warm water of the Gulf Stream increases another five degrees in its day and a half trip through the canal to meet the warm Japan Current.

"So Messrs. Hardesty, Jonson, Rousseau, and Harwicke are once again situated on the warm ocean currents. As the expression goes, they are sitting pretty. And they intend to keep sitting that way."

"But—but—" the Chief Commissioner spluttered indignantly.

Hardesty pointed out some cold facts. Absolute and irrevocable title had been given him and his colleagues to their northern holdings, and to the canal right of way. No objection had been made by anyone to the proposal. It was all strictly legal.

"A good portion of the Gulf Stream still follows its original path. It should be sufficient for any but the most greedy. No one can say we haven't done our best to avert strife. If it comes, we are on the side of lawfulness."

Hardesty ended the interview by darkening the screen. He looked weary.

"God knows I don't want war. The fact that the bowlies have some justification on their side makes this a nasty dilemma. I've tried to solve it the only way I know, by sharing with them.... But if we're forced into a fight, at least we have the advantage this time. If we had fought before, it would have been hopeless. Now, if anyone intervenes, it must be in our behalf. We have the law with us."

Jonson nodded. "I see what you meant that last day in the Commission hearing room."

Within twelve hours they had the bowlies' answer. It was a hundred-pound hydroxyl bomb, aimed to destroy the mouth of the canal.

Ten minutes later the northern sky was black with ships. Dozens of the most fantastically ancient rocket cars, totally unarmored and unfit for battle, were piloted by bowlies. Without the faintest idea of proper maneuver and tactics, they drove forward recklessly, seeking to dump tons of HE to blast the hated canal out of existence.

Hardesty sighed, gave the signal to battle stations. Scattered along the length of the canal were his slim fighting forces. Most of them were concentrated at the Caribbean end. Though they were small in number, all were trained fighters, equipped with the latest in interceptor-pursuit rocket ships. Jonson scurried to his own ship, eager for battle.

The tiny group of defenders blasted off to meet the enemy hosts. Using their superior speed and agility, they easily avoided direct hits by their opponents' crude weapons. Spinning, diving, looping, they weaved intricate patterns throughout the massed flight of rattletrap bowlies' ships. Proton streams stabbed viciously.

Strangely, though, the casualties were few. Acting on Hardesty's instructions, the defenders concentrated only on disabling the enemy ships, forcing them down before they could come within bombing range of the canal. Their strategy was to slip behind an unsuspecting ship and destroy the rocket tubes with a quick blast. This left the bowlie pilot no choice but to spiral down on his stubby wings and try to find a soft landing spot.

From his observation point above the battle, Hardesty thought it looked like a comic opera war, in which no one ever gets hurt. But mid-air collisions suddenly accounted for three of his men. They plunged Earthward in their flaming silver coffins. Some of the bowlies were also crashing to their deaths. But they were victims of poor piloting. They often drove directly into the defenders' proton blasts and had their ships wrecked, instead of just the tubes.

After a savage running battle, the invading fleet seemed to have been reduced by half. It was obvious that some of them were managing to filter through by sheer weight of numbers.

Hardesty's attempt to fight mercifully was a terrific handicap. Tremendous detonations began to jack the air as hydroxyl bombs struck the canal.

Anti-aircraft fire stammered into action. Then blood was shed in earnest. There was no time to do anything but fire hastily at the diving ships and quickly duck.

Inside his own AG ship, Hardesty's face grew more tight and drawn as every minute passed.

"This is bad," he muttered to Galen, who was obviously aching to get into the scrap. "I hoped to discourage those fools, whip 'em in this first thrust so they'd fall back and think things over. Once they do that, they're sure to come to their senses. They're in a fanatical rage right now. That will wear off, though. But if we're forced to shed much blood before they do snap out of it—" He shook his head worriedly.

In their own defense, Hardesty's men would soon be forced to fight back in total war. It would be kill or be killed. A terrible and bloody war would inevitably be started.

He signaled Galen down into the fight to aid his thinning ranks. Like a hawk after a pigeon, the big AG plunged. Quickly, they spotted a lone bowlie scurrying low over the canal. He was followed by a leaping spray of exploding Earth as he stopped a string of bombs along one bank. Doom caught him unaware.

Galen slipped deftly up beneath the enemy's tail, in his blind spot. Hardesty's marksmanship left the invader's rocket tubes a fused, molten mass.

The pilot reached for the ignition switch, hoping to glide to safety without power. But he was too late. The bowlie ship shuddered as the rocket blasts went off inside the hull. The rattletrap spun end over end, streaming flame like a pinwheel, then vanished abruptly into the canal. Water boiled. Steam arose in a swiftly dispersing cloud.

Hardesty groaned aloud at this misfortune, then directed Galen back along the canal. It was showing wear and tear, especially at the Caribbean end, where it had been half-filled in by repeated bombings. It was nothing that the mechanical moles couldn't repair in time. But it was beginning to look as if there would be no one to use the moles for a long time to come. If the battle got further out of hand—

Young Hardesty was not a religious man. Yet in a fumbling way he offered up a brief but earnest prayer that the carnage might somehow be stopped before it was too late.

And, as sometimes happens to the deserving, a miracle did occur.

It was heralded by the warning light and buzzer on the viso-phone, both of which went into a frantic dance. A fuse blew out. It was automatically replaced, before Hardesty managed to turn the switch. The screen was a wild blur of distorted images and the loudspeaker howled with static. Someone was blanketing out all wave lengths, intending to tune in with an all-frequency broadcast on every receiver within hundreds of miles.

Hardesty glanced at the sky above. As he suspected, a gigantic spaceship hovered near the stratosphere. It was so large that its identifying color could be distinguished even at that distance. It was an official Government ship.

"I reckon Stony Face'll be wantin' a word with us," hazarded Galen.

The old pilot was right. The screen quickly resolved into the features of the Chief Commissioner of the I.S.C.C. For the second time to Hardesty's knowledge, the man was registering the extremes of emotion. This time it was wild with excitement.

"Hardesty!" he shouted. "Bowlies! All of you, down there. Stop the fighting. There's no longer any cause for war!"

Battle sounds dribbled away to silence as everyone warily digested this statement. The muted stuttering of countless rockets was the only noise. The Commissioner took advantage of the temporary truce.

"Miss Judy Vance has been with me the last few hours, checking on an incredible report. Just so you won't think I'm trying to deceive you, I shall have her tell it to you herself."

Judy Vance stepped into view on hundreds of the belligerents' screens. Her eyes were shining. Words tumbled from her mouth.

"It's true! Something wonderful has happened. Reports have dribbled in from the Arctic regions all winter. At first no one paid any attention. Then it suddenly dawned on somebody that an amazing transformation was taking place in the frozen north. It was confirmed just before the rush began. The Commissioner and I have just returned from checking it!"

She paused to catch her breath.

"There *is* no more frozen north, men! Snow fields have melted. Glaciers have begun to dwindle. There hasn't been a serious storm all winter along the northern Alaskan and Canadian coasts. Hardesty's canal, by turning the warm current up over the top of the world, has changed the climate entirely. Millions of acres of rich, black land have been opened up for almost year-round farming.

"Quit this fight, men. Hardesty has given us something much more precious in exchange for his Gulf Stream. Back to the soil, men, and take up again our true heritage. It's ours just for the asking!"

Judy Vance's voice was ringing with joy. Its emotion captured her listeners. From all over the miles of aerial battlefield arose the roar of joyful shouting. Rockets blasted rhythmically in fiery triumph.

"Hardesty," came the girl's voice once again. "Oh, Hardesty! If you're listening, please come up to the Government ship. I want you to see for yourself the wonderful thing that's happened."

Young Hardesty and Judy Vance peered through the floor port of the Government clipper. Down they stared at the miraculously changed face of the North. Dr. Myles was with them, shaking his head in astonishment. He muttered dazedly about temperatures and equalization of barometric pressure.

Hardesty watched tiny, distant figures of the bowlie vanguard arriving in their battered ships. Almost to a man, when they put foot again on virgin soil, they knelt and scooped it up ecstatically between their hands. Joyously they reveled in its warm richness.

No longer were they a lost legion. They had come into their own once again!

"It's ironic that we should be the last to realize what's been going on right under our noses," Myles said. "Hardesty City isn't five miles off the coast. Yet we were all busy putting the City back together again and preparing for a fight. We never even spared the time to— Hey! Isn't anybody listening?"

No one paid him the slightest heed. Hardesty and Judy Vance were looking into one another's eyes.

"I'm so glad it turned out this way," she breathed. "I realized all along that you were partly right—"

"And I knew you were only trying to help those unfortunates—"

They stopped, searching awkwardly for words. Then Hardesty said a few that could fit together.

"It's funny. Right from our first meeting, every time I saw you I got all mixed up inside. I thought it was anger at a red-headed upstart. But I guess now maybe it was something else, huh?"

Judy Vance smiled in the immemorially cryptic way of a woman who has found the one man she was seeking.

[The end of *Waters of Wrath* by Arthur K. Barnes]