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MINOS OF SARDANES

by CHARLES
B. STILSON

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MINOS OF SARDANES

By

Charles B. Stilson

Author of "Polaris—of the Snows"

Strange was the call that summoned him across the frozen wastes to unknown Sardanes, and stranger still his mission.... For only he, of all the world, knew the secret that would save that gem of Paradise lying hidden beyond the Southern Pole—a gem brighter than eternity, colder than the stars—and more dangerous to possess than the Rose maiden....

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CHAPTER I

THE DRIVE AGAINST DEATH

Two men stood on the bridge of a speeding ship in a place of ice and fire. A storm rode with them, a tempest shrieked and moaned and tore, and around the ship seethed and tossed the waters of the furious Antarctic Sea. Ice floes cracked and crashed. Giant bergs, staggering under the lash of the gale, added the dull thunder of their impact to the wild din.

Yet all the fury and clamor afloat paled in comparison with the appalling splendor of that which was taking place on shore.

On the port side of the vessel, a scant league across the heaving frenzy of wave and ice lay land. Once a stark, bleak mountain range, rising inland from its beetling shore cliffs, now it was gashed and quivering in the throes of a terrific volcanic outburst. Rocky hillsides were laced with streams of molten, iridescent fire. Above them mighty peaks tottered and crumbled. The titanic detonations of sundered mountains, with each new outpouring of the tremendous forces struggling for release, drowned all the strident discord of shrilling air and booming sea.

For a full score of miles along the inland range the mountain crests had been riven to loose the internal torrents. Cascades of white-hot lava poured down their calcined sides, in places streaming over the foothills themselves, to be quenched in clouds of roaring steam where the sea met them. Geysers of flame shot skyward from some of the more lofty peaks, and spread out like the unfolding petals of monstrous, unholy lilies, thrust into bloom from the underworld.

Above them loomed masses of vapor, rolling and shifting, and were lost in the murk of the Antarctic night. Below, the raging fires lighted land and sea for leagues, the colors of blue and green and violet reflected back from the myriad facets of the whirling icebergs with dazzling magnificence. Across the churning chaos, where every wave was a dancing flame, each mass of ice a lustrous opal, six miles to the west, the great fires shone against the cliffs and peaks of another shore, that day cold and quiet and snowbound.

Destruction, many hued and fantastic, menaced the ship in a thousand glittering shapes, but she tore forward through the turmoil. A long gray cruiser she was, her sides sheathed in steel, and with the Stars and Stripes whipping from her bow.

One of the men on the swaying bridge, a blond and youthful colossus, clothed from head to foot in skins of the white bear, leaned toward his companion and lifted his voice to a shout, to carry above the screaming pandemonium.

"Hinson, your friend spoke truly," he cried. "Here, indeed, are the great fires." With a sweep of his arm shoreward, he indicated the long arrays of flaming furies.

It was the first time for hours that either of the men had spoken. Indeed, since the ship had entered this arm of the sea and come upon the stupendous eruption of nature's vitals, there had been little conversation aboard, with the exception of sharp orders and a few subdued comments among the crew. Volcanoes they had expected to find, but no such tremendous display as here confronted and overawed them.

"Now, this is Ross Sea. Back there to the northwest lie Mount Sabine and Mount Melbourne. Here, where the great hills burn, is King Edward VII Land," pursued the young man. "Yonder," he pointed ahead to the south, "lies the pathway to Sardanias. Shall we be in time, old Zenas Wright, or will the end have struck already?"

Zenas Wright, member of the American Geographic Society, one of the first geologists of his day and world famous as an authority on volcanic phenomena, tore his gaze unwillingly from the most splendid exhibit of his favorite science his eyes had ever seen. He shook his shaggy, white old head slowly.

"I can not tell, my son," he said. "Often the great changes of nature are of slow growth, and may be months or years in the making. Again, they are done in a day. An outburst of such violence as this one I've never seen before. It would seem to me that the end must be at hand down there, if not already passed. We must make haste."

He turned his short, wide-shouldered figure. Clutching the bridge rail with mittened hands, he settled his ears again into the protection of his great ulster, and feasted his eyes on a sight of which he would never tire.

From the wheelhouse another man came onto the bridge. He was tall, lean and weather-beaten with close-set eyes above high cheekbones, and the alert and upright carriage of a soldier. For a moment the three conferred, the newcomer tugging impatiently at his sparse, black mustache, while he took in the scene around him with sharp glances.

"Speed, and speed, and more speed, Scoland," said the old scientist.

"Aye, speed," echoed the young giant, "all the speed in your good ship, Captain, while yet there is open water. Yonder, ahead, the ice gathers for the drive, and there we must needs go slowly. So speed while speed we may."

Scoland nodded shortly and strode back to the wheelhouse. Down the speaking-tube to the engine-room went his call:

"Crowd her, Mac, crowd her!"

"Aye, Meester Scoland, aye! But, mon, is she no doin' beautifully the noo?" The grizzled MacKechnie turned from the tube in the bowels of the cruiser, to bellow his orders among cursing, panting stokers and sweating coal-passers.

For this was a race with death; not the death of one man, or of a ship's crew, but the extinction of a nation.

Down this swirling pathway one of the men on the ship had passed once before. No stout ship swam under his feet on that journey. He rode on a careening iceberg. He was the fur-clad young viking on the bridge. His name was Polaris Janess.

Born in the wilderness of the Antarctic by one of the strangest freaks of circumstances, Polaris had reached manhood seeing no human being besides the father who had reared him. When that father died the young man started to break his way to civilization.

In his wild adventurings northward he had found Rose Emer, an American heiress, lost in the snows. Where they made their camp an ice floe broke up, and they were whirled down the coast to the south again on an enormous berg. Inland, they had found the kingdom of Sardanes—Sardanes, the mystical volcanic valley, set like an emerald in the white fastnesses of the Antarctic, blooming with tropical verdure, and peopled with a fragment of the ancient Greek nation, the Hellenes, whose victories Bard Homer sang. And they were the first people from the outer world of men to set foot there in nigh upon three thousand years.

There a king would have wedded the American Rose, but Polaris fought his way out of that valley with his dogs and guns, saving the girl, and taking with them Kalin, the young high priest of Sardanes. The priest had died in the snowlands, but the man and the girl had come at last to the ship *Felix*, Scoland's ship, from which the girl had strayed.

Long before they reached America, Rose Emer had lost a not-too-warm admiration for the captain in a great love for the man who had saved her. Scoland, the daring explorer, who had reached the South Pole in an airship, saw the girl won from him by the man from the wilderness.

Fearing lest the girl was glamoured by the strange events through which they had passed, and might come to scorn the half barbarian that he was, Polaris delayed to wed her for a year, which he devoted to intense study of men and their ways. Of books he knew much, and commanded many languages; of men he knew little.

Before the year was ended came Zenas Wright, with a report from the Smaley and Hinson expedition into Ross Sea, telling of a mighty volcanic outbreak there. The scientist declared it to be an outpouring of the fires which warmed Sardanes. With the going of those fires, he asserted, the mystic valley was doomed to return to the wastes, and its wonderful people to die.

"It is fitting that the man who discovered Sardanes should be the man to save her," said Zenas Wright to Polaris, "and without you, who know the way and the people, the trip would be well-nigh hopeless."

Polaris had responded to the call of what he deemed to be an almost sacred duty. Still unwed, he said farewell to his Rose maid for another long year, to start south and face the hardships and perils of the Antarctic once more, and to fetch to America the two thousand or so inhabitants of Sardanes, or as many of them as should be found alive.

With tireless haste a relief expedition was organized. Dogs were brought down from the upper reaches of the Yukon. Men whose lives and callings had inured them to the perils of the colds and the tempests of the snow-lands were enlisted for the great errand.

Foremost among those who came to enlist for the venture was Captain James Scoland. He came with a heart full of hot hate for the man who had balked him, and whom he considered little more than a half-mad barbarian. But he hid his hate well, and bided his time. With Polaris Janess, the enmity that had been between himself and the captain was a closed book. He had forgotten and forgiven. Scoland was a man of unquestioned bravery, a born leader of others. Above all, he had the knowledge of the Antarctic that made him an invaluable ally.

Polaris accepted his proffered services gladly.

Through the influence of Zenas Wright and of Scoland, the United States second-class cruiser *Minnetonka* was turned over for the use of the expedition, and manned. All the great fortune his father had left him Polaris had guaranteed in payment for the expenses of the expedition. Danger and death lay before him. He would be a poor man if he returned. He did not falter. He stood on the deck of the rushing ship, his topaz eyes turned toward the blazing, thundering mountains on the shores of Ross Sea. Their weird lights shone on his handsome, high-featured face, but at times he saw them not. Persistently there arose before him a picture of a quaint old New England garden, bright with its sunshine, its phlox and marigolds and honeysuckle. He looked again into the gray eyes of the garden-woman; long eyes, wet with tears. He felt her soft lips cling to his. In the moaning of the wind he heard again her sad voice pleading, "Oh, Polaris—how can I let you go?" and a great gray dog that answered to the name of Marcus stood by them, whining and ill at ease.

From his reverie the voice of Zenas Wright recalled him.

"The bergs are getting thicker," the old man said. "Stout as this ship is, we will have to slow down soon, or risk worse than we've risked already. You see the sea narrows down there ahead?"

"Aye, old man, it narrows, and then sweeps wide again, so wide that from one coast you may not see the other for many a long day," Polaris answered. When he spoke it was with the quaintness of expression that had come to him from the pages of the "Ivanhoe" of Scott, a treasure he had found among the few of his father's books that were not of science, and over which he had pored and pondered lovingly through many years. A few short months of civilization had not worn that custom from him.

Zenas Wright gazed aft. "Well, whatever happens to me now," he said, "I've seen a sight to-day few men have ever seen."

He waved his old hand toward the spouting hills, which they were now leaving behind him. "I'd like to study that eruption and write a book on it," he added regretfully. Despite his age, and the long hours he had spent on the bridge he left it with a vigorous springy step as he went below.

At racing speed, wherever the way lay clear, the stanch *Minnetonka* tore forward, her nose of steel pointed straight into the dark, mysterious South, hurling her eight thousand tons, through every available gap in the ice flotilla with all the strength of her twenty-one thousand horsepower.

Down the seas behind the vessel, faster and ever faster, crept the dawn of a six-months' day.

CHAPTER II

THE CURSE OF ANALOS

On the brink of the ledge of death in the crater of the Gateway to the Future crouched Analos, high priest in Sardanes. Two hundred feet below him in the monstrous funnel of the crater, seethed the lake of undying fires. Billowing vapors wafted from that troubled caldron passed upward beyond him, an endless procession of many-hued wraiths. First mist, smoke and sulfurous gases intermingled, spiraled and coiled in the drafts that blew through the mountain's cone, and passed on to the vent of the enormous flue, three hundred feet above.

The rumble and muttering of the raging flames smote his ears continually. Beneath his feet the solid rock of the hollow hill vibrated and trembled. Anon as the wreaths and curtains of vapor shifted and curled, disclosing their furious source, the weird light shone garishly on his red vestments of office. His high-templed, crafty face, above its black beard, turned livid in the glare.

It was evident from the tense bearing of the man that he was himself in the grip of an inward fire that threatened

to break forth with consuming fury. He ground his teeth, and blood ran from his bitten lips into his beard.

"Curse them, O Lord Hephaistos! Curse them, for thy sake and for thy servant's!" he prayed as he prayed many times before. He stretched his arms out over the gasping pit, raised himself on one knee and sent his voice wailing out across the fire-shot depths.

"Aye, curse them and spare them not! Curse him that was before me here! May Kalin be accursed! Curse him who now opposeth my will! May Minos be accursed! Curse her who hath flouted me, thy priest! May she be thrice accursed! Curse them all, and for all the years to come! May they know no rest in Sardanes or in the world! May they find no peace in that far place beyond, whither thy gateway leadeth!"

Panting for breath, he paused. His writhing features were hideous in the flare from the chasm. Again he tossed his arms wildly.

"Come to my aid, Hephaistos!" he screamed. "Aid thou thy servant! Give me a sign, that I may know. A sign, Master, send me a sign!"

Booming up from the depths, his answer came—a mighty diapason from the throat of the crater that seemed to carry with it every chord of nature's tonal gamut. As if the hammer of Hephaistos, indeed, had smitten, the solid rock beneath him quivered to a terrific shock from the bowels of the earth.

Almost jarred from his foothold, the man by a quick spring backward, saved himself from toppling into the fiery funnel. Crawling on hands and knees, he approached the brink of the ledge again, and there lay flat. His eyeballs bulged and his senses swam when he gazed downward.

He saw the fire-fretted sides of the giant crater swept free of all their clouding vapors: every glittering vein every projection, every detail of their many strata, revealed in startling clearness by a blinding flood of light. He saw the fire lake itself surge upward in its white-hot sheath. Up, up the sheer declivity of the crater it crept. As it came, for yards above it the rocks glowed red.

Another tremendous shock swayed the ledge where the priest lay. Masses of rock, reft from the precipitous walls near the mountain summit, hurtled past him down the chasm. Again the molten lava heaved up a great wave. Never in all the traditions of Sardanes had the fires of the Gateway leaped so far! From the center of that swirling maelstrom there arose a cone twenty feet high. It opened with a shriek as of a legion of devils released, and an appalling pillar of blue flame shot up from it and stood like a plume.

Although the highest reach of the flame was a full hundred feet below him, the blast of the heat was like to burst the veins of the watching priest. His very beard curled in it. Springing to his feet, Analos went back to the darkness of the passage that led to the terraces on the lower slope. Already it was hot to suffocation in the winding corridor.

Down the spirals ahead of him Analos heard the squealing of his affrighted priests as they scurried for the open. But Analos quaked not. He strode forth from the lofty arch of the portal and trod the upper terrace with the step of a master conqueror. He glanced up the outer acclivity of the mountain. He saw its peak ablaze with a crown of fire against the gloom of the Antarctic night—a crown which shone there for the first time since man had made history in the valley of Sardanes. He drew a deep breath, a breath of triumph and exaltation.

"Master, thy sign is sent!" he cried.

With head held high, Analos passed down the fire-lighted terraces. As he went, he heard through the red twilight of the valley cries of wonder and heart-rending wails of fear.

Afar on the Hunter's Road, twenty miles to the north and west of the valley, Minos the king and eight of his hunters followed the trail of the white bear. Two sledges they had with them, each hauled by six-horse teams of the sturdy little Sardanian ponies. But Minos coursed the snows more swiftly by far with a lighter sledge, whisked over

the frozen crusts by a racing chain of beasts that could outstrip the small horses by two miles to one. *Seven great gray dogs drew the sledge of Minos!*

Now, a strange thing must be related. When Polaris fought his way put of Sardanes, along the crater ledge and through the rift in the wall of the Gateway to the Future, his team of splendid dogs battled with him. Their fighting fangs aided him fully as much as did his long, brown rifle and brace of revolvers in holding Minos and his men back until it was time to pass the rift and join Kalin the priest and the Rose maid. One of his fiercest charges was made to avenge the dog Pallas, when she was struck down by an ilium spear, and pitched over the brink of the ledge.

Although her master gave her up for lost, Pallas did not die. When Minos the king made his way back to the valley after his last struggle with the outlander, men came and told him that the beast lay sore wounded and moaning on a rock-ledge in the side of the crater pit, some score of feet below that from which she had fallen. They would have stoned her to death, or let torches fall to drive her into the fire lake, but Minos would not suffer it. The king himself ordered that he be let down the crater wall with ropes. There he bound and muzzled Pallas and brought her to the upper ledge and to his palace, and tended her hurts, for Minos was skilled in the rude surgery of the valley.

Analos, who succeeded Kalin as high priest in Sardanes, later demanded the brute to be a sacrifice to Hephaistos, but Minos withstood him and his priests, and the dog lived on.

Some six weeks after her rescue from the pit, Pallas whined her mother joy over six blind puppies. Twice the great darkness had fallen on the Southland since the man of the snows had left it, and the pups had grown tall and strong. Minos had given them much care, and it was his whim to train them and use them as had Polaris. Now, with Pallas as the leader, they drew the king's sledge.

Sardanians, who had never known dogs until the advent of the strangers, eyed them askance, but the will of Minos was an ill thing to tamper with.

The chase was fruitful. When the king and his hunters broke camp and turned homeward, where the red haze of the moons of Sardanes lighted the southern horizon, the carcasses of two monarchs of the wastes were lashed to their sledges in token of the huntsmen's prowess.

Three miles from the north pass into the valley they stopped to rest and to feed their beasts. Minos was busied straightening out a kink in a harness strap, when he heard a shout of amazement. A flash of light shone with startling brightness across the wilderness of rocks and ice hummocks and snow.

The king sprang to his feet and saw a mighty, flaming pillar spread fanwise heavenward from the summit of the looming bulk of the mountain that lay to the left, at the northeast sweep of the oval range that encompassed Sardanes.

Gloomy and silent always through the centuries since their ancestors had found the valley, now the towering peak of the Gateway to the Future blazed with a fury that dimmed the moons of all its sister mountains. That sight smote the Sardanians with terror. With upraised arms, they stood among their snorting beasts, their staring, affrighted faces ghastly in the flare.

Beneath their feet they felt the rock-strewn bosom of the plain heave gently, and, after a short space, again. They moaned in terror.

Of a mold to be daunted little by natural or supernatural, Minos the king was less moved than the others. While they groaned and called on Hephaistos, he strode among them with a quieting word.

"Old Mother Nature played a trick for her amusement," he said. "She hath lighted Sardanes brighter than ever before, and now she melteth the snows of the wilderness. Look! Never saw I such a mist!"

He pointed to the east. Extending from the foothills below; the Gateway, north-east, as far as their eyes might see, a rolling bank of fog hung over the snow lands.

"Bring in the sledges as soon as may be," Minos ordered. "There will be many a shaken heart in Sardanes at yonder sight. I will hasten on."

He leaped on his own sledge, gave the word to his dogs, and in a moment the swift snow-runners had carried him around a bend in the pathway toward the valley. As he went, he heard the dull booming of the huge drum that hung in the hall of the Judgment House, whereon some lusty wight was making play with all the strength of his two arms.

So it happened that, as Analos crossed the green stone bridge over the river, the king entered the valley through the north pass, both of them bound in haste for the Judgment House.

As was his custom, Minos left his sledge in a rock-built shelter at the base of the pass cliffs, where the snows broke into bare ground and rock. With his gray beasts in leash, he hurried through the pass and set off across the valley at a loping, light-footed gait. Skirting the marshes, where the river lost itself in its subterranean channels at the lower end of the valley, the king and his shaggy companions crossed the bridge and took a path above the main road that led them over the slopes through groves of gigantic hymanan trees.

The yellow-bronze and rustling foliage of the forest monarchs reflected the radiance of the mountain moons in a shimmer of whispering gold. Among their gnarled trunks the shadows lay thick. He was still ten minutes' journey from the Judgment House when the gleam of a white robe in the dusk and a subdued growl from the dogs told the king that some one loitered in the path ahead of him. He heard a woman's voice raised in anger, a voice that thrilled him to his heart's core.

Silencing the muttering beasts, he went forward cautiously.

A black-haired girl stood with her back to the bole of a tree, against which, her white arms were thrown out at each side. Her head was tilted defiantly. Her bosom heaved and her black eyes snapped. In front of her the dark form of a man barred her way. He was draped in a long robe, the cowl of which obscured his features.

"How darest thou!" Her tones bit scornfully. "How darest thou lay a hand on the daughter of the Lord Karnaon? I care not for thy threats of powers. I tell thee that wert thou twice what thou art,—to me thou wouldst be all that is foul and abhorrent. Mate with thee!" She laughed shortly. "I'd sooner mate with the meanest of my father's servants than with thee."

Analos, for he it was whom opportunity had tempted thus to tarry, shook his clenched fists over the head of the girl. Brave as she was, his face turned so hideous in its leering rage that she shrank.

"Twice hast thou flouted me, girl," he said in a choked, hard voice, "me, the minister and mouthpiece of the Lord Hephaisotos. It shall not be so again." He tossed an arm toward the flaming crown of the mountain whence he had come. "Yonder the god ruleth in all his splendor, and I am his faithful servant. To the Gateway shalt thou come, whether thou wiltst or no. Thither shouldst thou go this moment had I not more pressing business elsewhere."

A strong and open hand smote the words from the priest's lips. In an instant he was gurgling on the ground, his neck beneath the heel of Minos, and the dogs were sniffing about him, anxious to lay hold.

"The Lady Memene may go her ways in peace," said the king quietly, bowing low.

No word of thanks got Minos for his timely coming. The girl flashed him one quick look, and then passed by him hastily with head up. He gazed after her, ruefully.

"It seems that I am no more welcome than thou," he said, and dragged Analos to his feet. "What doings are these, priest, and what passeth yonder in the Gateway that doth so affright Sardanes? Answer, thou!" He shook the burly priest like a refractory child.

However wicked in spirit, Analos lacked not in bravery. He snatched an ilium dagger from his girdle and struck fiercely at Minos's chest. The big man saw the flash of the weapon, but made no parrying move. Instead, he shoved the priest from him with one powerful arm, and so violently that Analos spun many feet and brought up against the trunk of another tree.

Minos called the dogs back, which would have followed eagerly.

"Wouldst thou, Analos, indeed?" said the king with a laugh. "The time cometh, I can see it plainly, priest, when thou and I must try a fall for place in the kingdom. Thou growest insolent. At least there be two in Sardanes who fear thee not." He laughed again. "Now, an thou hast naught to say, begone on that most pressing business of thine, and cross not my path again in such pursuits as I found thee but now, lest I be tempted to waste a spear on thy dirty carcass."

Twice the priest essayed to answer, but each time his words were choked. Then there burst from his throat an inarticulate bellow of rage. He turned and dashed madly away into the shadows, his black robe flying out behind him.

"He groweth troublesome, as did Kalin, who opposed Helicon, my brother," mused Minos; "but he hath not Kalin's mettle. For myself, I did like the man Kalin passing well."

Another burst from the great drum recalled his errand to the king, and he hastened on.

For more than an hour had Gallando the smith smitten the drum that hung in the pillared hall of the Judgment House until he was aweary. Far through the valley and over the hills had its thunderous summons rolled, calling to all Sardanes.

Those who labored had ceased, and those who slept had wakened. They had come until nearly two-thirds of the inhabitants of the valley were gathered. Those abroad when the first spurt of flame had leaped from the peak of the Gateway and the earth had quaked had let everything fall and hastened in. Those indoors had followed soon. From the open façade of the hall more than a thousand white faces were turned toward the flaming hill. From the upper reaches of the valley, nearly a score of miles away, others were coming with other tales to tell. Black fear sat heavy upon the shoulders of all.

"Where is Minos the king?" "Analos? Is he here?" "Doth Hephaistos smite his people?" These and many other cries rang in the hall. One stupendous liar swore that he had seen the shape of the god himself outlined in fire on the crest of the Gateway—and many believed his tale.

Women, their high-plaited hair disheveled, tunics all awry, clung to their husbands. Bewildered children added their shrieks to the din and confusion. Never had Sardanes been so shaken.

Not until the somber figure of Analos was seen ascending the marble steps of the dais at the upper end of the hall was the clamor quieted. The priest crossed the platform and sat himself on the black stone seat of his predecessors. He stared gloomily out over the sputtering of the torches in their cressets about the hall, an occasional sob or murmur of a frightened child, the singing of the river, and the far-away roaring of the hills.

Some minutes passed, and from the door at the rear of the dais came Minos. His dogs trooped in with him, bristling at sight of the priest. The king, took his seat on the ancient, raised throne of his forefathers, with its plinth above, whereon were carved the words

MINOEBAEIVEYETHEEAPAANHEOH

(Minos, Basileustes Sardanes Ho Hekaton, or Minos, hundredth King of Sardanes.)

A number of the nobles climbed up the steps from the lower hall, and took their stations below, the throne.

Scarcely was the king in his place when the tumult of affright again broke forth, an unintelligible clamor of many voices. Minos raised his hands to still it. He addressed his people calmly, with the demeanor and smile that long before had earned for him the name of the Smiling Prince.

"Tradition saith, and the writings of history which the priest keep do confirm," he said, "that in time very long ago our ancestors came to Sardanes from a great, bright world to the north, a world wherein they were part of a mighty people. By a strange mischance came they to Sardanes, and might return no more whence they came. Here

have their descendants lived in peace and plenty. But a little time ago two strangers, that Polaris—of the Snows, and the Rose girl, came among us. They, too, told us of the outer world—a place so different from this that we scarce could conceive of it. There the sun shineth always. Here he is hid from us for half of each year. There all things live in his warmth. Here are we warmed by the ring of fire-mountains, and all without is the bleak desert of ice and snow.

"They told us also, did the strangers, of the nature of the fires which spout yonder, and of the mighty forces in the earth from which they are sprung. Wherefore tremble ye now, my people? Because a hill shaketh? Because a fire flameth anew that perhaps flamed aforetime, long before your forefathers came? Fear not. These things be of nature, and of nature only, and will pass. I, Minos, your king, am sure that no great harm impendeth, and that all things will be again as they have been."

Reassuring as were his words and his calmness, murmurs broke out anew from the people.

"Never hath it been so chill in the time of the great darkness as now it is," cried a voice.

"Hephaistos! Hephaistos! These things must be of the great god, who is sore wroth with Sardanes. The priests have said it," called another. Above the many-tongued murmur swelled the name of the high priest.

"Analos! Analos! Let us hear from the wise priest of the Gateway!" they shouted.

With a smile of grim defiance at the king, Analos glided from his seat and stood at the edge of the platform. He drew his long, black cloak around him, and stood poised like a bird of dark omen, wrapped in its sable pinions. His somber eyes glowed.

Good actor was the priest. He spoke never a word until the silence of death in the hall told him that he had the attention of every straining ear.

"Angered is the great Hephaistos," he began slowly, in hollow tones. "And hath he not borne much? Is it a little thing that the kings of Sardanes lead the people from their god? Aye, and that one of his own chief ministers hath turned false? Now the god turneth his face from the valley. Punishment falleth apace. Already hath the doom of Kalin, the traitor priest, struck. It was revealed to me in a vision that he and the outlanders perished in torture to the wilderness—but first Hephaistos used the man of the snows as an instrument of vengeance against those in high places who turned against their master.

"Remember ye the deaths of Helicon, the king, of Morolas, his brother, and of many others? Take warning and tremble, ye of Sardanes! A greater vengeance is at hand—"

He was interrupted by the clatter of flying hoofs on the roadway down the valley from the south, and the rumbling of a two-wheeled chariot. Four ponies driven at furious speed drew the chariot. Down the long roadway they dashed, and brought up with clashing hoofs on the stones of the paved court without the hall. Their driver, a tall, black-bearded man, sprang from his car and pushed through the press in the hall, tossing his arms wildly.

"From the mansion of the Lord Ukalles in upper Sardanes am I come!" he screamed as he reached the steps to the dais. "And this my message: Quenched in darkness are the moons of Mount Helior and Mount Tanos, and there is ice to the thickness of a man's hand on the holy river Ukranis, where never was ice before!"

Like standing grain in a chill wind the people quivered, as a thrill of abject terror ran through them—a despairing murmur. Joy that was demoniac lighted the countenance of the priest. He leaned far out from the verge of the dais and spread his arms with fingers hooked and clutching at the air.

His voice broke in on the echo of the courier's dire message.

"Woe to fair Sardanes!" he howled. "Hephaistos smiteth and spareth not. For the sins of the few shall the many be smitten, Woe to Sardanes! I have read it in the Gateway that the doom shall fall until the punishment is completed, and every soul in the valley bendeth to the will of the ancient god!"

Back from a hundred throats was flung the cry:

"It shall be done!" And from a thousand: "What is the will of the god? How may we be saved? Tell us quickly, Analos!"

To his full height drew the priest. His face was alight with triumph. He had chosen his words and his time well. Advantage was with him.

He cast a glance over his shoulder at Minos. The king had come down from his throne. The nobles were grouped around him. To this new terror Minos had found no answer. He had no comfort to give his frenzied people to which they would listen. Superstition and fear and the wild words of the priest held them in thrall. Analos had full sway.

Not for an instant was the crafty priest at a loss. His god was in the ascendant. Now was the time to wrest into his own hands the power he desired in the valley. With the blind faith of a fanatic, he believed in the ancient religion; but, like many another priest in the world before him, he invested his own person with much of the power of the godhead he preached.

Troubled not a whit was he by the calamity that threatened in the valley. That was punishment merely—how dire or how long he cared not. When it was completed Sardanes would be in the hollow of his hand.

"Back to your homes, ye Sardanians!" he thundered. "And pray to the Lord Hephaistos for mercy. On the third day from now shall word come to you from the Gateway, the word of the ancient god. When the word cometh, obey it, or he shall not spare you. Let the word go forth through the valley that the captains of all the crafts and the nobles of the land be assembled here in the Judgment House on the third day. Then shall the commands of Hephaistos be made known to them. Away! Away! Analos hath spoken."

He threw his mantle over his head, passed out through the narrow portal at the side of the dais, and was gone, on his way through the gloom to the Gateway. In subdued silence the people trooped from the hall and slipped away to their homes.

Soon the thrashing propellers of the *Minnetonka* carried her beyond the radius of light sent out across the sea from the bursting volcanoes. It lay far behind, a garish bar athwart the waters. That faded also, until only a reflection could be seen against the sky, a waving, lambent radiance, like that of the Aurora Australis—which the voyagers had deemed it to be when first they had sighted it on their way into Ross Sea.

As they passed into the gloom of the Antarctic night their perils grew apace, and their real fighting began. Everywhere the bergs lay about them. Now here, now there, darted the cruiser, backing, turning, and zigzagging, seeking the safety course. Again rolling clouds made stygian gloom, and the cruiser fought on through the unquiet seas by the rays of her powerful searchlights.

One good turn of fortune came when the fury of the gale was abated. But the icebergs drove on in the clutch of a racing current, a constant menace. A hundred times the stout ship pushed through between drifting masses of ice that closed their scintillant, clashing jaws behind her, thrilling those on deck with the nearness of complete disaster. As many times were the engines reversed in furious haste, to back the steel-clad adventurer from a closing trap that would have crushed her like a toy.

Here it was that the cool captain in command showed all his resourcefulness, had need for all the splendid seamanship and the reckless daring that had brought his ships unscathed through three voyages into the polar zones.

Fortunate was the foresight that had armed the ship for the dangers she was to meet. From her bow projected an immense ram of wrought steel, almost razor keen at its cutting edge. All around her sides she was rimmed with a protection of triple rails of the same metal, clamped fast to her hull, and set with powerful springs, to withstand the shock of impact with the floating ice. Ever her twin-screw propellers whirled within a sheltering hood of steel. She had been dismantled of many of her trappings and remodeled to conserve the two qualities most needed in her present straits—speed and strength.

Useless as he was in the management of the ship, Polaris spent four hours on deck to one in his cabin.

"Better to meet death up here in the free air, if death be fated for us, than to strangle down there like a trapped beast," he said to Zenas Wright. When perils thickened, he abandoned his cabin altogether, brought a huge bearskin on deck and slept there, when sleep he must.

Although in life's evening, the scientist was almost as active. For days Scoland seemed never to sleep at all. Under his guidance the *Minnetonka* pierced the dangers like a projectile launched from a cannon of the gods, and directed by a calm, clear mind that lived within it.

When they reached the lower end of Ross Sea a pale, uncertain light that shone in the north behind told them of the coming of the polar day. There a new and formidable obstacle confronted them. Where the sea narrowed to a three-mile channel, beyond which lay wider water, great ice floes had drifted in and barred the way. They were formed of drift and flat ice, of no great thickness, but lay acres in extent in a mighty jam. All along the edge of that field fretted and stormed the giant bergs that had come down with the tide.

Back and forth across the narrowed sea the *Minnetonka* steamed, playing her searchlights in vain. No passage was open. Scoland called a conference.

"There are two things we can do," he said. "We can hew ourselves a safe harbor and wait for the jam to break up, when we can fight our way through the channel with the bergs; or we can smash a way through ourselves with the ram and explosives. We can't remain as we are, for the big fellows are getting thicker. Every hour lost adds to the danger of being crushed in where we can't get out, perhaps of being sunk. Which shall it be?"

Lieutenant Everson, second in command of the *Minnetonka*, said nothing. Zenas Wright, who was a scientist first and a sailor very far second, said as much.

"The snug harbor idea likes me varra weel," remarked Engineer MacKechnie, and he peered across the glistening floes and out at the drifting bergs with anxious eyes.

"It may mean weeks," suggested Scoland. "What do you say, Janess?"

Polaris glanced down the barred lane of the channel with heightened color. "I am no man of the seas," he answered quietly, "but I say, break through. For, look you, the wind rises again. Here all is held. Yonder in the open sea the bergs drive on. Where we break a pathway, no berg may follow us. When we are come through, the gale will have cleared the waters beyond, and we shall find our sailing smooth, ahead of the jam and behind the bergs that are gone before."

"Aye, mon, mon, the boy is right," cut in MacKechnie. "This ship's not a plaything. Yon is varra hard cutting, but she can do it, dinna fear."

Scoland turned to one of the mates. "Jameson, bring up the lyddite," he ordered.

Where the floe fields seemed weakest and narrowest, near the left of the channel, the captain sent men onto the ice with drills and explosive, charge after charge of which was sunk into the floe and exploded from a battery in one of the cruiser's boats.

Scoland took personal charge of the mining. Under his orders, his men blasted out a large basin in the floe, a hundred yards in from its face.

"If we cut a channel straight in," he explained, "the pressure of the jam is likely to close it at once, or else shut it like a vise on the cruiser, after she is in. We will blast a narrow channel to the basin, drive the ship in, and then make another basin farther on, and a second channel. By zigzagging and letting the channels close in behind us, we will avoid the danger of being nipped and held fast in the floe."

Like a watchful sentinel, the *Minnetonka* patrolled the edge of the floe, nosing small vagrant bergs from her way, in an endeavor to keep cleared the spot where she would have to make her dash for the channel. Scoland stood on the bridge, tapping its rail with a nervous hand, his sharp eyes darting from one to another of the larger ice masses which might be disposed to contest a passage with his ship.

The men on the ice signaled that their lyddite train was laid and ready. They withdrew to a distance, one of them carrying the small battery, from which the slender connecting wires led to the sunken charges of explosive.

Picking up her boat, the *Minnetonka*, under reversed engines, backed away and stood ready for the dash to the basin. Twice the captain raised his megaphone to his lips to give the word, but each time he hesitated. Suddenly he dropped it and sprang into the wheelhouse. Immediately the ship lunged forward.

Keenly alive to these proceedings, Zenas Wright and Polaris, from their station near the forward davits, wondered at this new move.

"Now what has happened?" questioned the scientist. "One would think we were going into battle. See, they are manning the guns!"

Polaris glanced down the ship's rail and saw the eager-eyed gun crews tearing the coverings from their long-silent ordnance. Forth from their ports crept the grim muzzles of three of the *Minnetonka's* six-inch guns.

"Battle it is to be," said Polaris; "and yonder floats the enemy." He pointed to where a huge iceberg had broken from its mooring at the edge of the floe, and, momentarily gaining headway, was drifting in to bar the channel way.

The ship swung about sharply. One of her powerful searchlights played steadily on the face of the looming ice cliffs as it came on, its hundred towers and crags glittering and flashing in the brilliant ray, a mass of floating silver. A sharp word of command, and the three gun captains, bronzed and alert, bent to their levers with machinelike precision. The crackling of the floes and the grinding of the bergs were lost in the thunder of the guns.

At that point-blank range, the effect of the volley was terrific. Where the shells struck, the surface of the berg flew to pieces. The air in the radius of the search-light was filled with a shower of scintillating splinters. Larger masses of ice slid from the face of the slow-moving mountain and plunged sullenly into the tossing waves. A cavern was made from which a thousand gleaming fissures shot into the darker body of the ice behind.

Working like beavers, the gunners reloaded and sent another crashing discharge into the floating wall at its water-line. As a small chunk of ice is parted by a few blows from an ice pick, so the repeated impact of the exploding shells shattered the berg and sundered it. Pitching and toppling, down came its lofty towers into the sea. Its giant menace crumbled into scores of insignificant blocks and a spreading bank of drift.

Again the *Minnetonka* backed and pointed her nose toward the floe, whither her searchlights were concentrated. Scoland reappeared on the bridge.

"Fire!" he shouted frenziedly through his megaphone.

A dark figure on the floe let its hand fall on the battery knob. A succession of thunderous detonations followed, and from every lyddite mine was flung skyward a column of water and glittering debris. For many yards the mighty floe pitched and heaved.

Her twin propellers thrashing the water to foam, the *Minnetonka* drove her steel-clad length through the opened gap smashing the wreckage right and left, and came to rest in the basin beyond. She was scarcely in before, with a long, angry roaring, the great rift closed behind her.

As the cruiser pushed through the channel a cry of consternation rose from the men on the ice, drowned in the turmoil, of her passing, but audible to one man on her decks whose ears were almost more than mortal keen. Another cry came from the gunners as Polaris dashed through them and hurled himself into the ice-strewn waters.

One of Scoland's sailors, separated by some distance from his fellows, had climbed to an icy eminence near the west side of the basin. In the disturbance which followed the blasting of the channel and its closing, the ice where he

stood had parted from the floe, and, his footing riven from under him, the poor fellow had been pitched into the dark water in the midst of the pounding drift.

From the deck of the cruiser, Polaris heard his despairing cry, and, straining his eyes through the half twilight, saw his form silhouetted for an instant against the ice before he took the plunge.

Straight and true leaped the son of the snows. One of the things civilization had taught him that he had never known before was the art of swimming. The staring gunners saw his white-clad figure reappear once many feet distant from the side of the cruiser, and then he was gone tearing his way with powerful strokes through the swirl of ice and water.

As fast as many willing hands could cast her loose, a boat was put out from the ship. The miners on the ice rushed to the spot where their comrade had disappeared. Across the drift one of the cruiser's search-lights swept a long finger of light. It played on sullen waves and heaving ice, but revealed no struggling swimmer.

"That is the last of Janess, and the finish of this expedition," rapped out Scoland.

Zenas Wright, standing, at the rail of the ship beside him, groaned aloud. He did not see the fleeting, satisfied smile that accompanied the words of Scoland. A mist that was not of the air or sea rose and obscured his vision, and he wiped it away with his shaking old hand.

The boat had nearly reached the edge of the basin when a strong white arm shot up, not ten feet away from it, and laid hold of a projection on one of the larger pieces of drift. A glad cry arose from floe and ship as, with a lusty thrashing of feet, Polaris emerged from the water and sprawled his length across the slippery surface. Again the shout, when it was seen that he dragged after him a smaller darker form. Parkerson, the sailor, was unconscious, having struck his head against floating ice in his fall.

When the boat returned, and Polaris still bearing the senseless man in his arms climbed over the side, the cruiser's company cheered him as only American sailors can cheer a hardy deed bravely done.

Minos the king left the Judgment House shortly after the going of Analos, the high priest of Hephaistos. With the king went the nobles.

"When ye have slept, come ye on the morrow to the palace," he bade them. "There is much to be considered, wherein I would have your counsel."

A short way from the Judgment House on the slopes of Mount Latmos, stood the palace of the kings of Sardanes, a temple-like structure, reared of the green stone from the cliff quarries and faced with lofty pillars of white marble. Thither Minos walked slowly, pondering much. One of his household, a lad of some eighteen years, who had tarried when the people fled from the hall, now followed his master.

As they ascended the path through the great trees toward the royal hill, a scrap of conversation drifted to the ears of the king from the porch of the stone cottage of one of the tillers of the soil.

"The world hath rocked. Cold enters the valley. The dread high priest threateneth the king. What will the outcome be?" A woman's voice asked the question.

A man made answer: "Hephaistos ruleth the priests. Analos and fear rule the people. What can the king do?"

Minos smiled. What, indeed? Yet there were some things that he could and *would* do.

A booming stroke of the huge drum echoed through the valley, telling that the day was done, and that one faithful soul had not forsaken its post. The drum swung between two pillars in the center of the Hall of Judgment. Near to it was a vase of nearly the height of a man. In the bottom of the vase was drilled a tiny hole. The vase was filled with water from the holy River Ukranis. Usually a lad watched it.

When the water had seeped away and the vase was emptied, a process that consumed some ten hours, it was the duty of the watcher to smite a blow on the drum and to refill the vase. Then another took up the vigil. So the Sardanians kept rude reckoning of time.

When Minos reached his home he sent the lad to fetch parchment, brush, and pigment. By the flaring light of a torch he wrote:

To the Lady Memene, greeting:

Though the syllana be a flower little in accord with thy thought, yet when the hour shall strike that thou hast need for a friend who will do and dare all things, wear one on thy gown.

Folding his message, unsigned, the king called the lad.

"Alternes, take thou this parchment to the hall of the Lord Karnaon," he directed. "Give it into the hand of the Lady Memene, and to no other. On thy way thither send to me Zalos and three of his men. Then seek thou thy rest."

Minos seated himself on the topmost step of the palace portico and leaned his head against a pillar. His eyes roved across the shadowy valley, where the flickering light of the mountain moons mingled with the cold, pale radiance of the Antarctic stars. He scarcely saw it. He had fallen into a reverie.

Ill had gone the love-making of this king. Never, since the days when they had played together as children, had the Lady Memene given him one word of love, one single glance in which a lover might read joy. Ah, those far, fair days of childhood! Then he had been but the younger brother of the man who would be king. She had been kind then.

Imperious, proud-spirited, disdainful was this Lady Memene in her dark loveliness. Minos could only dream that she would soften to him, and to him alone. Days of terror were falling on the valley. Perhaps worse were to come. He would like to stand at her side and hold her safe. Well, he had sent her his first love letter. He would watch for the syllana, the peerless blue rose of Sardanes that bloomed in the months of the long night, and, though Sardanians knew it not, bloomed nowhere else in the world besides. It was the Sardanian symbol of love. Ah, that she would wear it, if only to call him to her service!

Presently came Zalos, a tall man of nearly forty years, captain of the huntsmen, who were, even more than the nobles of the valley, close in the affections and confidence of the king.

"Thou hast summoned us, O king," said the hunter, raising his arm in salute and indicating three of his men who stood back in the shadows.

"Aye, Zalos, old friend, I would lay a trust upon thee," replied Minos. "Set a guard about the hall of the Lord Karnaon. Let no hour pass that thou or three of thy men are not on watch. If aught untoward befall there, let the feet be fleet that bring the news to Minos. And if help be needed there—I believe thou understandest—give it—even with thy spears, and at the cost of life. I trust thee."

"Say no more. It shall be done," answered Zalos. "The life of every hunter in Sardanes is thine, O king, for the asking." He saluted again, and was gone along the forest paths with his men.

The king was aroused again by the cold muzzle of the dog Pallas thrust against his hand. She whined inquiringly. He patted her rough head.

"Ha, Pallas," he said, "thou art another who fearest not the darkest the Gateway hath to send. And thou art the namesake of a goddess, if the scrolls of the priests read truly; a mighty goddess of old, who was the friend of this Hephaistos. Pallas Athene they did name her. A most wise goddess she, and came not to Sardanes." He rose and led the dogs to their quarters at the rear of the palace hall.

Far up in the side of the Mount Latmos, above the palace, a deep cave pierced the rock. It was the granary, storehouse, and treasury of the Sardanian kings. Thither Minos climbed after, his hunters were gone on their errand, carrying with him a smoldering torch of hymanan wood. At the entrance to the narrow, tortuous passage which led into the cave he whirled the torch into flame and passed in. The cave was wide and deep and high. Along its sides were huge bins, wherein was grain sufficient to garrison a small army for some time. Some forty feet within the cave a small jet of water spurted from a crevice in the rock, ran along a well-worn channel to the mouth of the cave, and drained away down the mountainside.

Minos thrust the torch into a cresset in the wall. He dragged forth from its place a bulky chest of dark, carved wood. From within it shone the gleam of polished metal. The king took out and laid down on the rock floor one by one the pieces of a suit of armor—greaves, corselet, a belt with pendant leaves of metal, a rounded helm with winged crest, and last, a shining, keen-bladed sword in its sheath and thongs.

Aside from the battle in the crater, when Polaris Janess hewed his way out of the kingdom, and an occasional bickering among the quarrelsome fellows, Sardanes had never known war. Then whence this warlike gear?

Little there was in the valley that the king had not interested himself to learn, with the one exception of the religion preached by the priestly crew, at which he scoffed. One of his favorite crafts was that of the smiths who wrought in the iridescent ilium smelted from the mountainsides. It had been his fancy to fashion this suit of mail, beating it from the finest metal and modeling it after the armor sculptured in the groups of statuary at the Judgment House, representing the founders of the race, the Greeks from the blue Aegean Sea. Each piece had Minos copied, only making them of a larger mold, to fit a figure taller and broader than that of any Greek who ever had trodden the valley.

There were no arms like these in Sardanes. Those which the Greeks had brought there had rusted into red dust centuries before.

Minos packed the bright trappings in a sack and carried them with him back to the palace. He had a feeling that the time was near when he should wear them. Then he, too, sought his couch, for he was sorely wearied.

Ill tidings were early on the morrow. Another messenger rode down the valley to tell that one more of the volcanic hills had yielded up its spirit, and that a rim of white snow was creeping over the mountainsides.

One by one came the nobles of the valley to the house of Minos. Each man represented an ancient house, each house one hill of the valley's ring. All were gloomy, some of them beset by fears but little removed from those of the terror-stricken people. The king found less of comfort and support among them than in the company of his hunters, who, at the least and last, would die for him to a man.

Two there were, the oldest and the youngest, who upstood firmly for him.

"That which the king shall decide will Garlanes abide by," said his old-time friend and counselor, still hale and strong despite his grizzled crown. "I am old, and it mattereth little. If it come to an issue, the wrath of Hephaistos shall not divide my friend and me."

Almost insolent in his carelessness was the boy-lord Patrymion. "If this be the end of the world, and thou promisest me a fight, before the end, then am I with thee, also, Minos the king," he laughed, "and will kill me a fat priest or two right willingly, if so be that they will fight. Methinks it is they and not thou who do weary their master."

So doubtful was the mien of the remainder of the nobles that the king did not prolong the conference, but soon dismissed them. It was agreed that no decision as to what course to take could be made until Analos had made known the word from the Gateway.

More and more the king felt that he must meet what perils were before him almost alone. His people and the nobles were slipping from him. Well, so be it. His spirit rose to the test.

Two more days passed slowly. Three more of the moons of Sardanes waned from their mountain heights forever. The state of the stricken people bordered on frenzy. All the ordinary pursuits of the valley were abandoned.

Then, at midday, the booming of the drum gave them a moment of wild hope. The word of Hephaistos had come!

Surrounded by his hunters, Minos hastened down the hillside to the Judgment House. From upper Sardanes down to the Gateway the people were assembled, a throng that filled the hall and overflowed in the paved court. The captains of the crafts were gathered at the foot of the steps to the dais. The nobles were in their places. The king ran his eyes quickly along them. Only the Lord Karnakon was missing.

Standing in front of the black stone throne of the high priest was a heavily draped figure. It was not Analos, but one of his ministers.

As soon as the king had seated himself on the throne the priest advanced from his station to the center of the dais and threw back the robe from his face. He was Karthanon, oldest of all the priests of the Gateway, the oldest man in all Sardanes.

For a moment he stood with eyes fixed on the floor, and there was tense silence in the hall and without. He folded his arms. His cracked old voice rose shrilly:

"Minos the king, nobles, and people of Sardanes, greeting. This word from the Lord Hephaistos through the mouth of Analos, mightiest of his servants. List and heed, for a terrible doom falleth, and there is but one way in which it may be held back.

"Let Minos the king forego his kingship. It is written that no more shall a king rule in Sardanes!

"Let her whom they name the Lady Memene be sent to the Gateway, the bride of the great servant of the ancient god.

"Let the man Minos, who hath dared to lay his sacrilegious hand of violence on the sacred person of the mighty high priest Analos, let him be sent to the Gateway also, where he shall be scourged with whips and humiliated as seemeth best to the servants of the god!

"Thus and thus only may the doom be averted, thus the god appeased. Hephaistos hath spoken!"

Through the pause that followed his words broke the voice of Minos. The face of the king was smiling no longer, but fierce as a winter sea as he leaped down from his throne:

"This the answer of Minos to Analos. Had *he* dared to come here with such a message as he hath sent, Minos would have thus broken him in two!"

He caught from its place the black stone seat that had stood there for many a hundred years. It was of a weight that would have troubled two stout men to lift, but in his anger the king plucked it up and swung it aloft like a chair of wood. Then it crashed down on the marble floor and splintered to fragments.

"So would I treat thee also, Karthanon, but thou art old, and after all but the bearer of a message. Get thee back to the Gateway and tell thy master that a king still rules in Sardanes!"

The priest shuffled to the entrance at the side of the dais. In the doorway he turned and lifted his hands.

"On the people falleth the dread doom!" he cried.

Through the moments of these happenings not a man in the hall had stirred, save Minos and the priest. Now there was a surge forward toward the dais. Nearest the steps stood Istos, captain of the smiths. He sprang up on the

platform.

"Not for one man shall the whole people perish, one man and a maid. I, for one, will strike a blow for the priest and the god!"

Up flashed his spear and drove straight at the breast of Minos. Before ever the king could spring aside or guard, it struck him on the breast, struck hard and clanged and fell on the marble floor.

Minos threw his cloak from him and leaped forward, the torchlights glittering strangely on the suit of armor which he wore. He wrenched from its sheath the good broad sword he had forged, and struck. The keen blade hit the smith on the point of his shoulder and hewed through to his ribs, so terrible was the stroke. With a scream Istos fell and died.

Made mad by fear and superstition, the men in the hall pressed forward. Up the steps they sprang to avenge the smith and seize the king. Minos met them with sword aloft and a fierce smile on his face.

"Never thought Minos to slay his own people," he cried bitterly, "but here be blows for the taking!"

The unarmed nobles fled from the dais. Only Garlanes and the lad Patrymion tarried, seeking weapons. From the rear of the throne poured a score of Minos's hunters.

"For the king!" they shouted, and ranged themselves at his back.

Just as the battle hung in the balance a lad leaped through the door by which the priest had departed. He sprang to the side of the king.

"From Zalos I come," he gasped. "He bade me to tell thee that Karnaon taketh his daughter, the Lady Memene, to the Gateway!"

Three Sardinians lay dying on the steps to the dais. Those behind shrank back from the whirling ilium blade.

"Now here is another black game, afoot!" cried Minos. He sheathed his sword. Before the crowd in the hall could guess Iris purpose, he and his hunters had dashed in hot haste from the rear door of the Judgment House.

CHAPTER III

THE LAUGHTER OF MEMENE

In the forest on the slopes above the Judgment House, Minos and his men halted, and the king made a division of his forces. If there was to be battle of the few against the many, he must have a fortress.

"Imacar," he said, "take thou six men and speed on to the cave in the side of Latmos. Hold it against all comers. Seven men may there defy a thousand. I come hither, anon, I and these others."

In haste Imacar told off his men, and the king and the others plunged ahead along the forest paths. Below them they could hear the clamor of the crowd at the Judgment House, now confused and undecided whither to pursue.

Over to the left of the rugged heights of the Gateway mount rose the more precipitous steeps of the Mount Zalmon. Between the two was the notch of the northern pass that led into the Hunter's Road. At the foot of Zalmon lay the marshes of the holy river Ukranis. Still farther to the west, on the turn of the hill toward Mount Meor and Mount Latmos, lay the estate and palace of the Lord Karnaon.

As they ran, Minos questioned the lad who had come from Zalos. He learned that two other priests of the

Gateway had come down with Karthanon the Aged. While he had gone on to the Judgment House to deliver the message of Analos, they had proceeded to the home of Karnaon. There a conference had been held. At its end the Lady Memene had been summoned. With the priests, her father, and a number of servants they had set out for the Gateway.

"And did she not resist?" asked Minos of the lad.

"Nay, O king, not openly, and thereat was Zalos much perplexed. He followeth on with two men, and knoweth not whether to intervene or no."

There was no direct way by which to reach the Gateway from the Mount Zalmon. The pathway skirted the marshes to the green stone bridge across the Ukranis. From the bridge a road lay straight to the foot of the terraced hill of the god.

Minos, his thirteen hunters, and the lad left the slopes a distance above the marshes, crossed the tilled lands, and reached the bridge. They were none too soon. When they reached the river they could hear voices on the marsh path in the direction of Mount Zalmon. The king bade his men hide in a clump of astarian bush on the river bank.

"Bide thou there, and stir not unless I call," he ordered. Alone, he strode on to the bridge and took his stand in the angle of the first buttress.

He had not long to wait. Within five minutes the party from the palace of Karnaon hurried from the path to the road and approached the bridge. First came the Lord Karnaon, clutching his daughter by the arm. On either side of them walked a sable-robed priest of Hephaistos. Close in the rear seven or eight men of the lord's household slunk along, with many a side-long glance, fearful of they knew not what.

The Lady Memene looked neither to right nor left, but carried herself very straight. Her face was pale now, but her eyes blazed, and her mouth was set in an ominous line.

A burst of shouting came to their ears from up the valley in the direction of the Judgment House, and the members of the party paused at the bridge. As they hesitated, came a hollow clanking, and an apparition moved out from the buttressed rail and confronted them in the bridge's center—a frightening apparition in clashing armor.

For a moment there was awed silence. Karnaon let go his hold on his daughter's arm and stepped a pace forward, for the lord was no coward. The two priests of the Gateway drew close together behind him. From the servants rose a moan of terror, and they seemed ready to make a break up the valley road.

Not one of the party recognized Minos the king in the towering figure on the bridge. To their startled imaginations, he seemed of more than mortal proportions. The red glare from the heights of Salmon and the Gateway shimmered on his armor. His winged helm shaded his face. For aught they guessed in their first fright, he might be a supernatural messenger come forth to meet them from the temple of Hephaistos—if not the god himself.

He spoke, and broke the spell.

"Whither in such haste goeth the Lord Karnaon, and for what purpose?" demanded the king.

Karnaon started, and immediately pushed forward. "Ha, 'tis but Minos, who was the king," he growled. "Bar not our way, for we be summoned in haste to the Gateway."

"Who *was* king'?" repeated Minos sternly. "Mend thy manners, lord, for the king still liveth, and while he liveth he ruleth."

"Thou art no more king. Analos hath banned thee with the ban of Hephaistos," countered Karnaon. "But I will not waste words with thee. We must hasten."

"Tarry a moment, Karnaon. Thou art all too hasty," Minos replied. "I would learn the mind of the Lady Memene concerning this journey to the Gateway, and if she knoweth its purpose, and goeth willingly."

"What's that to thee, rash man?" said Karnaon. "My daughter doth not wait thy word as to her goings and comings. She doeth as I, her father, command."

"That is only half the truth, father," broke in Lady Memene. "As thou hast commanded, thus far indeed have I done, but there is little of my own will in it."

As she spoke, the girl whipped her cloak aside, and the heart of Minos leaped within him. For on the whiteness of her gown was set a splendid syllana bloom!

One glimpse he had of the shining petals of the blue rose, and the cloak fell back and hid it, but in that one glimpse the mind of the king cast all else aside. She had summoned his aid. Gladly would he face priest or god or angry men for this woman.

One of the priests had been whispering low among the men of Karnaon. Now he sprang aside.

"Seize him!" he yelled.

Armed with spears, the men rushed at the head of the bridge. Karnaon and the girl were thrust aside. Minos saw the flash of glittering points before him, and leaped backward, tearing his sword from its sheath. At the same instant Zalos and his two men, who had crept up unobserved, leaped from the shadow of the bridge to rush in the rear of the spearsmen.

Minos was not minded to slay any of these poor fellows. Already his heart was sore for the four dead men he had left in the Judgment House. Only to save his lady and his own land would he slay. He shouted to his hunters who lay concealed. With the giant form of the king on the bridge in front and the seventeen determined hunters who now ranged themselves behind them, Karnaon's men lost all stomach for fighting. They hung back.

"In, and bear him down!" shouted Karnaon. He snatched a spear from one of his servants. "Fear not, here cometh aid!" It was true. Down the valley came the clamor of running men. Karnaon set foot on the bridge.

Minos leaped from where he stood. Spears clashed on his armor, but he was unscathed by edge or point. Catching one of Karnaon's men by the shoulders, Minos floored three of his fellows with the sweep of the man's body. He broke through them in an instant. The Lord Karnaon struck fiercely at him, but the stroke fell short.

At the side of the bridge stood the Lady Memene. The king paused at her side. His hunters closed in around them. By reason of his superior height, the king could look over the heads of the men around him. Scarce three hundred yards away on the white road were more than a score of running Sardanians, shouting loudly as they came.

"Choose thou, lady," he said low in the girl's ear, "and quickly, for here come those who will make choice for us. One word, and I hold thee against all Sardanes, and to the death."

Here was a strange girl, truly. She looked the king in the eye coolly. "Choose thyself, and please thyself, O king," she answered.

"Thou wearest my flower," he replied.

"And I bear also a gift for the priest," she interposed. "See." She opened her cloak and showed him the hilt of a long-bladed ilium dagger. "Little joy would he have had of the bride he did summon," she said, and laughed a short, hard laugh.

Karnaon's men had rallied. In a moment they would rush the hunters. On down the roadway tore the party from the Judgment House. Minos parleyed no longer. He stooped and caught the girl under shoulders and knees, lifting her as a mother might lift a child.

"To Latmos!" he shouted. "Death be the lot of anyone that stays us!"

Thrusting his way through the hunters, he took the marsh path, running, lightly and fleetly, for all the weight of his armor and his lovely burden. Zalos led his hunters in a short, fierce charge that turned back the men of Karnaon, and then the hunters broke and followed fast on the heels of their master.

Where the tilled fields broke into the foothills of Mount Zalmon, Minos turned, and plunged into the forest, making straight for Latmos. Before him all was quiet, but from the rear, where Zalos and the hunters covered his flight, the clamor and clash of arms told him that they were hard pressed. He set the Lady Memene down and drew his sword.

Two of the foremost hunters made a chair for the girl with their crossed hands, and started on for the cave. Minos ran back along the forest pathway. He found a running battle. Karnaon and his servants had joined forces with some thirty Sardanians who had gone to the bridge under the leadership of Gallando the smith. Finding their efforts to win the hunters of Zalos to their aid of no avail, they were making a desperate attempt to annihilate them.

Already two of the stout hunters were down. A number of others bore spear wounds, for all of the men of both the lord and the smith were armed with spears or daggers, and several carried axes.

Minos strode through the press of men to the center of the fighting. He found Zalos bleeding from a gash in his cheek, growling and dealing out blows like a wounded bear.

"Thou has done enough here, old friend," cried the king in the huntsman's ear. "On to the cave, thou and those with thee. 'Tis time that I, who am well protected, took a few of the knocks that are falling. Nay, tarry not. I will hold these who follow in play for a time."

Up flashed his sword, and he sprang into the center of the path. The hunters dashed by him into the shadows, and he stood alone against the pursuers. First man to meet the king was the Lord Karnaon. Spear met sword in midair and, straightway that spear was pointless. The keen blade shore through its haft, cutting it like a straw.

"Thee I will not slay, Karnaon, who wouldst slay me!" cried Minos. With his left hand he clutched the noble by the belt, jerked him forward, and hurled him back against the foremost of the pursuers so violently that both men fell and lay stunned in the path. Half a dozen ilium spears clashed on the king's armor, and one grazed his neck as he leaped over the fallen men and met their-fellows. In an instant he was among them, swinging his weapon until it shone in the pale light of the stars like a whirling ilium wheel.

"Come on, thou whom the priest hath made mad," he shouted. "Minos, who before had little to fight for, now hath much. Here lieth a short, straight road to the Gateway." As he shouted, he struck.

So close he was, that spears were well nigh useless to the men who bore them, and daggers fell harmless upon his armor. The broad, keen blade made sore havoc among the unarmored Sardanians. Three men were down and dead and a half dozen others were out of the fight with wounds to nurse, when Gallando the smith faced the king.

Gallando fought with an ax. He was a large man and powerful. Watching his chance he leaped to one side, just as Minos stumbled over the body of one of the slain men. For only an instant the broad blade faltered, and gave the smith opportunity. He swung his ax with both hands and brought it down on the winged helm of the king.

Minos saw the smiting danger and stooped low to avoid the stroke. It fell on the helmet with the clang of an anvil blow. Down to his knees sank the king, his senses swaying. Had the stroke of the smith's ax been one jot more direct, his opponent had not risen again; but it lacked that jot. The rounded helm turned the blow aside. The ax crashed from it to the ground, and was buried to the haft.

Recovering his balance, the smith poised himself for another stroke. Minos, his head still swimming, raised his sword as if to parry, then cast it from him suddenly, lunged forward and gripped Gallando about the knees. He put forth his strength in a mighty tug, causing the smith to let fall the ax. Before ever a man could move to his rescue, Gallando found the arms of the king clipped about his waist.

Never but once in his life had a man bested Minos at the wrestling game. Now, fighting for his life, he crushed the burly smith to him. Twice he contracted the muscles of his great arms. The veins of his forehead stood out with the strain, and his helm fell from his head. Once more he exerted all the strength of his body, bending forward to

bring his weight to bear. Something snapped like a breaking stick. Gallando's head fell back and his body went limp in the arms of Minos. His back was broken.

With Gallando dead and Karnaon out of the battle, the Sardanians lacked a leader with sufficient heart to take up the tale. They stood for a moment with staring eyes as the corpse of the smith rolled at their feet. Then they gave way and ran.

Catching his helmet and sword from the ground, Minos hastened on toward the cave. On the hillside above the palace he stopped, cupped his hands and shouted, "Alternes!"

A faint hail from below told that the lad had heard the call. "Loose the beasts," cried the king, "and then seek safety."

He waited a few moments, and then sent down through the dusk a long, shrill whistle. A full-throated chorus was his answer. Before he reached the mouth of the cave, Pallas and her six gray children had shot up the hill and were leaping about their master.

Basin after basin, channel on channel, the roaring lyddite tore in the ice jam at the lower end of Ross Sea. Untiringly the miners of Captain Scoland plied their drills. The steel-clad *Minnetonka*, ever restless as a prisoner pacing his narrow cell, churned and smashed about in each new harbor which the blasters formed for her, thus preventing the ice forming again into a solid mass, and holding her fast. Always alert, she dashed through each new passageway.

Now to the right, now to the left, the cruiser advanced, as the men blasted her zigzag channel course. As each new forward step was taken, the pressure of the vast jam closed the way and the channel was left behind. It was slow work, but sure. Behind the adventurers; the sun came slowly on his southern path, turning dim twilight into weak and pallid day.

Steadily as they worked, ten days passed and saw the blasters little more than a third of the way across the enormous jam. All around them thundered and crashed the ice in the grip of the great breaking forces. At times the uproar of smitten bergs and cracking floes made the sound of their exploding lyddite seem a puny and futile mockery of nature's mighty hammers. On the decks of the *Minnetonka* uneasy men paced restlessly, and, worn by waiting and danger, cursed or prayed, according to their natures. In their long hutches, the Alaskan dogs, still more uneasy, snarled and howled.

Seeking to turn the delay to some advantage, Polaris selected from the forty-odd dogs on the ship seven of the likeliest, and, with sledge and harness, left the ship to acquaint himself with them. It was time that they knew the master whom they must carry both fast and far. Huskies they were, from the finest of the Yukon strains, big and shaggy, their coats splotched with brown and white, but they were not the equals in size or strength of gray Marcus and his fellows, which the son of the snows had driven aforetime. He found them not at all lacking in temper.

On a level spot in the floe, not far from the ship, Polaris laid out his harness, and chose his animals for the positions in which he would have them run. Largest of all the brutes was the tawny Boris, sullen and vicious, but intelligent. Polaris selected him as the team leader, and the lessons began.

Awed at first by their strange surroundings, affrighted by the thundering ice and the occasional shuddering of the floe, the brutes flinched and whimpered, paying little attention to the man. Then over their backs and about their ears shrieked and cracked an eighteen-foot lash that demanded notice. With ears laid flat; the dogs cowered into a tense group, burning eyes alternating from the writhing whip, which snapped above them, but fell not, to the man who wielded it.

Urged by lash and voice, not one, but the seven as one, responded in a concerted rush on the new master. Snarling hideously, they flung themselves upon the man. Sailors watching from the ship set up a cry of consternation when they saw Polaris apparently overwhelmed by a wave of maddened dogs. But the son of the

snows was a match for any dog team that ever snaked a sledge. He met their rush with a powerful hand and a ready whip-stock, that seemed never to miss its aim. For the whip that had only menaced before fell now in earnest, fell on tender snouts with stinging force and a most disconcerting accuracy. Once more the mutinous beasts cowered away, trotting in circles with bared teeth, but loth to try conclusions with that vengeful whip-butt.

Boris, the leader, alone was unsubdued and persistent. Again and again, the brute gathered himself together and charged and leaped, howling with rage. Each time the waiting whip rose up to meet him, and the great brute, twisting his head in mid-air, sprang short and aside, to circle madly on the ice for another opening.

Soft-voiced methods were of no avail with Boris. He must be made to feel the power of the master, must be conquered at once, or he would be forever treacherous and useless.

Again the dog sprang from his haunches. That time no whip seemed waiting, but rested at the man's side. The huge brute, with a moan of hate, launched himself straight at his adversary's throat. Crouched low, Polaris let him come. Lightning quick, the left hand, of the man flashed out and closed on the windpipe of Boris, just below the clashing jaws. Watching sailors on the *Minnetonka* rubbed their eyes and looked again in wonder.

Polaris stood rigid as a statue in steel. His left arm extended straight in front of him, and in his grasp he held the struggling animal, held him as he had caught him, in midair, a yard above the ice—and Boris was no toy, but would have tipped the scales to the weight of a powerful man. Polaris' cap had fallen to the ice in the struggle. He wore his white bearskin garments. His yellow hair tossed back, he seemed to the watching, wondering men the embodiment of the wild spirit of this wild land, come into his own again.

With a stern eye to the other dogs, he held Boris, as though in a vise, and fear grew in the stout and sullen heart of the brute. To the terror of those steely fingers that clutched his throat was added the terror of the empty air, through which his four feet thrashed madly, and could find no hold or rest. The deadly grip tightened. The dog's struggles grew weaker and weaker. His jaws gaped wide. He gasped and gulped in vain for one breath of air that should give him life and energy and spirit to fight on. His struggles ceased, and he hung limp in the hand of the master.

Gently Polaris set the animal down on the ice, and relaxed the grim hold on his throat. With great gasps Boris took into his lungs once more the life-giving air. The man snaked in the long whiplash. Waiting a few moments until the great dog's senses had fully returned, he took a yard of the thongy tip of the lash and laid it smartly across the flanks of Boris, not cruelly, but with sufficient sting to make the punishment tell. The other dogs trotted uneasily about, sniffing, whining, and eying their fallen leader.

Presently Polaris stood up, turned his back deliberately on Boris and walked a few steps from him, still holding, the whip. He called the dog to come to him. The huge animal arose, shook himself, glanced shamefully at his mates, stretched himself, tossed his head with a snort, and followed after the man. Polaris bent down and patted his shaggy head, with a word of encouragement. At his touch, the brute trembled slightly, but the man's voice was reassuring, and the whip hung idle. Boris rubbed his head against the knee of Polaris and whined. He had found his master, and he knew it. Other dogs might, and did, turn on Polaris again, but Boris never.

One by one, the other brutes learned their lesson of obedience, learned that they served a wise and vigilant master, and gave in to the lash and the harness. Soon the man was able to take them far afield, and crossed the floe to the east for a number of long runs.

On the twenty-ninth day from the firing of the first lyddite blasts, the stout *Minnetonka* shook her sides clear of the drift ice from the last channel, and shot southward into free water. Picking up the miners and Polaris and his team, Scoland pointed a course some three miles from the eastern shore, and the cruiser tore on under forced draft, so continuously that the canny MacKechnie shook his gray head many a time and oft over the depletion of coal-bunkers.

"'Tis all varra weel, the gettin' on in such haste," he grumbled, "but, ma certes, 'twill be a long, weary drive back

again, and coal doesna grow on icebergs."

Several days of clear going gave all on the ship opportunity to take much needed rest, after the perils and labor that had racked both minds and bodies. Spring and spirits returned to jaded men, and it was an eager and hopeful crew that cheered to the echo on the day that Polaris shouted from the bridge:

"Steer the ship in to the left. Yonder is a point of land that my eyes remember well, and behind it a harbor that marks the end of this journey, I am certain."

It was the rocky promontory across which his own ship of ice had been broken, nearly two years before. Inland, to the north, extended the looming barrier range, which he had sought in vain to pass.

Polaris and old Zenas Wright stood on the bridge as the cruiser rounded the headland. The young man clapped the geologist on the shoulder, and pointed up the snow-covered slope, that led from the cove to the foothills beyond.

"There lies the way," he shouted, "straight in to the east, the way to Sardanes!"

Near to the cave entrance on the Latmos hill King Minos found the Lord Patrymion. The boy was sitting on a boulder, swinging his heels against it and whistling in a minor key the bars of a Sardanian love ditty. Leaning against the rock beside him was a long-hafted bear spear. In his belt were thrust a dagger and a heavy-bladed hatchet.

As the king came from among the trees, the lad stood up and saluted. Minos saw that the arm he raised was bandaged above the elbow. The king, whose own neck bore a slight cut, where a spear had stung as it hummed by him in the forest mêlée, and whose tunic and armor were red with blood not his own, smiled grimly.

"And did the Lord Patrymion perchance fall and bruise himself in the forest paths?" he asked.

"Nay, nay, O king, I came by this while a-hunting," laughed the lad.

"Hunting?" queried Minos.

"Aye, the game we play now in Sardanes hath fulfilled a part of its contract to my great satisfaction. Not an hour agone I did stick me the good, fat priest whereof we talked awhile back. Right pleasantly did he kick and squeal—"

"Hast slain a priest of the Gateway?" Minos asked him. "I fear that is ill done."

"Nay, king, 'twas well done. 'Twere well, indeed, with us, were every one of the black crew hot alight in their own fires, with Analos, the high priest, frying merrily atop the heap. Then, perhaps, would the people listen to reason. This fellow did come from the Gateway to my palace on Epamon's sides, whither I had gone from the Judgment House to arm myself. He would have haled me thence to the Gateway like an unwilling maid. When he found me coy, he did raise mine own household men against me. Well, he got a dagger in his midriff for his trouble. And I got this scratch on the arm, with perchance a slit throat to follow, were it not that I am somewhat swift of foot. My men did rage upon me like fiends when they saw the priest down. I thought it better to die here in good company than where I was, so I came away."

"Hast seen Garlanes?" asked Minos.

"Nay, nor will I," said the lad shortly. "The men of Analos slew him on the portico of his own hall. That I had from the priest who came to summon me. Had he not given me that word, I might have spared him."

The king bowed his head. Garlanes had been his dear friend.

Within the cave the warmth from the bowels of the hill was almost oppressive. The men had lighted torches and

oil lamps, and were dressing their hurts, of which there were not a few, and discussing in low tones the details of the fighting.

In a carved chair of wood, just beyond the rim of light, the Lady Memene sat. Her face, as she rested it on her hand, was almost devoid of expression, but her black eyes, alert and lustrous, missed no detail of the scene before her. Minos removed a part of his armor, and laved his head and hands in the little streamlet. Although the girl appeared to take no note of him, not a move that he made escaped her. Each time that the king's glance strayed to her, and that was often, she appeared to be watching the hunters or the dogs, or anything but himself.

When he had removed the stains of battle, Minos crossed to her side. He seated himself on an ancient chest and considered her for a time with puzzled eyes. She made no move, nor seemed to notice that he was there.

"Lady," he said at length, "lady of the blue rose and the keen dagger, who reckest so little which thou usest, canst tell me now why thou hast come here?"

"Come here?" she echoed quickly. "Why, because thou didst carry me a part of the way and thy friend yonder the other part. Why else?" She flashed him an elfish smile.

"So we did," he answered. "Wouldst go back?"

"Not yet—unless thou sendest me," she replied coolly. "There is little at the Gateway to stir my heart. Here—" She paused, and the king bent forward that he might lose no word of her answer. "Here, methinks events will pass that will be worth the watching—unless thou dost weary of my presence and bid me go seek Analos."

Minos straightened his back suddenly. "Lady," he said, "I find thee of a temper like to that of the Lord of Patrymion, who would make believe that he careth naught for tears and death and doom, and laugheth at all alike. Yet back of all thy quips and scorns I believe there dwelleth in thee a spirit brave and true, as there doth in him also."

The girl inclined her head, but there was mockery in the bow. "Thou doest me too great honor, my Lord Minos," she replied. "Count not too greatly on thy estimate, for I fear thou hast mistaken me sadly."

This fencing with words suited Minos not at all. "In one thing I mistake not," he said, "and that is the heart of Minos." He hesitated, and then asked her, gravely and slowly, "Lady Memene, wilt be the bride of Minos?"

A ringing peal of silvery laughter was his answer, but the girl drew farther back into the shadows that the king might not see the red flush on her cheeks.

"Strange is the time thou choosest for thy wooing of a bride, O king! Thy kingdom tottereth. Scarce a score in all the land are faithful to thee. Thy head is target for curse of priest and spear of enemy. Mayhap Sardanes itself dieth. Yet dost thou woo a bride."

Up to his full height drew the king and looked down upon her. She waited for an angry answer, but none came.

"Nay, thou canst not provoke me, lady," he said gently. "I know not how it is, but the love I bear thee I think is so strong that it will endure all things and abide forever. All that thou sayest is true. In spite of all, I wait an answer."

Still farther into the shadows withdrew Memene. Her eyes shone strangely.

"The end is not yet. When that end cometh—when thou hast won or lost all that there is to win or lose, then thou shalt have an answer, King Minos, shouldst thou still desire it."

"Be it so, lady, I hold thee to the end, and will seek my answer then, though it be at the gates of death." He bowed and turned away.

Outside the cave two of the dogs were baying. Through the rifted rock came the voice of the Lord Patrymion:

"Here cometh the overlord of the Gateway devils. Say, king, shall I loose the beasts on him?"

"Nay, loose them not," called Minos. He caught up his arms and hastened to join the lad on the hillside.

Some forty paces down the slope stood Analos.

Patrymion held the gray dogs by their collars. "Well would I like to see them worry him," he grumbled. "Perhaps it is best for the brutes," he added. "They would surely die of a stomach sickness, did they taste him."

"What wouldst thou of Minos, Analos of the Gateway?" demanded the king. "Thou hast turned the valley to madness. Here we have little need for thee. Were it not that I will slay no more except to save myself and those with me from death, I would send a spear through thee where thou standest, Analos. Say, what wouldst thou here?"

"Insult me thou hast, slay me thou canst not," answered the priest, glowering up at the king from where he stood with folded arms. "Hephaistos protecteth his servant. I came to say to thee that the great doom falleth apace. Mountain after mountain adown the valley giveth up its fires. All upper Sardanes wasteth. This shall go on until thou and those with thee are humbled and Sardanes is as one in submission to the ancient god."

"Beside thee standeth one who this day hath smitten a priest of the Gateway. Give him up. Come thou with him to the Gateway, thou and the girl. For the sake of thy people, Minos, for the sake of the very existence of the Sardanes, yield thee to the god."

"Analos," answered the king, "did Minos for one instant believe that by any act of his Sardanes might be saved, in that instant he would perform it, however bitter. But thou are a madman, thy god of thine own distorted fancy. The things that are happening are in obedience to some law of nature whereof we know not. They will pass, and all will be as before, or they will continue; and Sardanes will be no more. Let that fall out as it is fated. Minos waits the end here, and yieldeth to no man."

Zalos and several of the hunters had come from the cave. Analos turned from the king to them.

"What saith the Captain Zalos?" he demanded. "For this rash man, no longer king of thine, and for the woman he hath stolen art thou prepared to die and to go cursed of Hephaistos to the torments he hath in store for those who rebel against him? Say, wilt not give him up, he and the maid, and save thyself and thy companions?"

"That will I not," answered the captain. "We have eaten the king's bread, and we are his faithful servants. Where he standeth, there stand we. Whither he leadeth, there we follow, be it to battle, to death, or to ghostland and its torments, if such there be. Forsake him? Not until my breath forsaketh my body!"

Zalos faced his men. "Is it not so?" he growled. "If there be a man among ye who thinketh otherwise, let him speak and stand forth." He fumbled with the dagger in his belt.

"Needst not fret with thy dagger, Captain," laughed one of the hunters. "We be all of one mind, and thou hast said it."

"I thank thee, friend," said Minos. His hand fell lovingly on the captain's shoulder.

"After all this useless talk, methinks some diversion impendeth," whispered the lad Patrymion. "Unless mine eyes are passing poor, spear points gleam in the thicket yonder and men are moving."

Minos peered keenly into the shadows beyond the priest. He, too, saw dim, moving shapes, and caught the glint of bare blades. He tightened his grip on his sword-hilt.

"Zalos," he said, "slip thou within the cave and fetch me the ilium disk that leaneth against the wall near to the spring. I think there is like to be more fighting anon, and I am still unwearied. Take the dogs with thee. They be of rash mettle, and I would not have them harmed."

Analos still stood in the little clearing, eyeing them gloomily, his features working.

"An the holy rascal swelleth much more with anger he will burst, and the foulness of the venom let loose from him surely will overcome us all," said Patrymion with grim humor. "See how his beard waggeth."

Zalos came from the cave and passed, to the king an oval plate of burnished ilium, nearly four feet in length and wide enough more than to cover his broad chest. It was the shield which went with the other arms he had fashioned. It had a broad leather arm-strap and a handhold affixed to its concave side.

The king slipped it onto his arm.

With a shake of his shoulders, the priest cast his black, robe from him and stood forth in the red vestments of the office of death. He waved his arms in air!

"Sons of Sardanes," he roared, "do the god's will!"

From every rock and tree near him creeping men sprang to their feet. A swarm of yelling spearmen charged up the slope.

CHAPTER IV

BATTLE ON LATMOS

At the opening of the passage into the cave the way was scarcely wide enough for two men to enter abreast. Farther in, where the entrance curved, it was narrower yet. There Minos elected to meet the attackers. He ordered the other men into the cave, whither Patrymion went sorely against his will.

"Art not going to take all the sport to thyself, king, I hope?" he asked. "I would make claim to a share in it."

"Thou shalt have it, and to spare, my lad," said Minos comfortingly. "No one of us will have complaint for lack of fighting while yonder red robe flameth in the valley."

As he spoke the king backed into the cave-passage and took position at the first turn; crouching low behind his shield. "Stand thou behind me here," he directed the boy, "and into thy keeping I commend any who may pass me." The king and the boy took their places.

The spearmen of Analos, fully two hundred strong, poured over the little plateau on which the cave fronted. With a rush and yell, they came, but found no foe to fight. Only the dark rift in the rock yawned silently before them. Strain their eyes as they might, they could not see what danger lay in wait for them within.

After a brief conference they decided to force the entrance, for Sardanians when not arrayed against their own superstitions, were not cowards. Two by two, for the way was narrow they crept into the passageway. Those foremost proceeded cautiously, and with their spear points well advanced.

In this warfare all the advantage lay with Minos. The besiegers could not see him, but from his position they were outlined against what light there was without the cave, and the king could see them well.

So it was that groping forward the spears of the first two of the attacking party clanged against something that was not rock. A flash in the dusk before them, a whine in the air, where the sword of Minos sang as it flew, and two of the warriors of Analos were out of the fight forever.

Behind them their companions sprang to their feet and thrust desperately with their spears. So straight was the way that there was little room for spear play. Thrust and cast alike fell on the rocky wall or the shield of the king.

Out of the darkness the strongest arm in all Sardanes swung unceasingly, dealing blows that none could see or parry.

The passage became hideous with cries and groans. Only Minos fought in grim silence. At his shoulder young Patrymion stood and laughed aloud at death unloosed.

Presently the king found his blows falling on empty air. Convinced that this method of battle was of small avail, the priest's men withdrew from the cave, dragging with them the fallen. They carried eight men down the steep sides of Latmos, to be sent to the Gateway, and five others were so sorely smitten by the blade that guarded the narrow way that they were little better than corpses.

"Now, let us out, master, and fall on them from behind," said Zalos. "One good charge may break their spirit."

Minos shook his head. "Nay, Zalos, we fight not save to defend ourselves. This slaughter of my people doth grieve me much. Would that 'twere at an end!"

"In verity, if thou grievest over long in thy present fashion, there will be none left in Sardanes to withstand thee," put in Patrymion. "At least let me go forth and hunt the high priest. With him dead, the rest are easily managed."

"Nay, he shall not be slain, and there's an end," said Minos sternly. "He hath coupled his mad talk to these strange manifestations in Sardanes, and so brought about all the trouble that is on foot. His death now will mend matters but little, for he hath done his damage among the people. When things right themselves once more (if, indeed, they ever do come aright), it is my will that he be living witness to his own confusion."

"Have they gone, or do they still watch, I wonder?" said Patrymion. He turned the passage and walked boldly to the entrance. Scarcely had he reached it when a spear whizzed by his ear and splintered on the rock wall. He picked the shattered weapon up with a laugh. "We are still watched," he said, as he bore it back into the cave.

Below in the hall of the Judgment House the stroke of the great drum echoed through the valley, giving notice of the passing of another day—a day fuller of events in Sardanes than any since Polaris of the Snows had fought his great fight on the crater-rim and struck out for the unknown North.

Through the sleeping hours a watchful hunter stood guard at the turn in the cave-passage, but no attempt was made to surprise the besieged. They ate from the store of grain in the cave and took what rest they could, undisturbed. With cloths from the king's chests the hunters curtained off a section of the cave for the Lady Memene, and thither she withdrew in silence, to sit with wakeful eyes through half the slumber hours.

On the morrow there was little rest for any. Within an hour of the first drum-stroke, the clamor of fighting men rang through the cave once more.

Again Minos took up the tale, but he found his foes more wary. Not again would they rush blindly the narrow way and the singing sword. They built a big wood fire at the edge of the plateau, in such a position that its flames cast their light into the passage. Six of their strongest warriors charged the cave-mouth. Four of them engaged the battling giant with their spears. The other two, on hands and knees, endeavored to creep under his guard, and got near enough to pull him down.

Straightway the Lord Patrymion went down on all fours, and with a spear in either hand fought between the knees of the king. As he fought, he taunted the attackers with mocking jests more bitter than the spear-thrusts. With his legs guarded, the strength of Minos was more than the strength of six. Of those who charged, only two reached the outer plateau alive.

In the respite the king turned and became aware of the Lady Memene. Shrouded in her long cloak, she stood against the wall of the passage, almost at his shoulder. She had watched the fighting with kindling eyes, but when Minos turned to look at her, she assumed again the mantle of indifference. Only behind the folds of her cloak one of her little feet was tapping, tapping on the rocky floor.

"Lady Memene, I pray thee, go within. Here is no place for thee," the king said. "A chance spear might pass this guard of mine, and then were all of Minos's fighting of no avail."

Wordless, she turned away and disappeared among the shadows.

Time after time the Sardanians, in stubborn fury, charged the cave-mouth. They fetched ladders from the valley, erected them against the cliff-face at the sides of the fissure, where the wall rose too sheer for a foothold otherwise. From the ladders, spearsmen leaped down, essaying to overwhelm the guardians of the pass and bear them down. But Minos drew back to where the closing roof of the entrance defended him from their attempts, and men who fell found the great sword and the keen spears of Patrymion and Zalos always waiting.

But one man, however brave and strong, cannot fight an army. Slowly, very slowly, the warriors of the priest tired that mighty sword-arm, although the dauntless spirit behind it flagged not. Again and again the rock passage was choked with dead and dying. Its floor ran red with blood. As often, the besiegers dragged the bodies of their comrades forth and renewed the struggle with fresh men. The champions of the god showed a fighting willingness with that of Minos; laying on for his own head and his dear lady.

At last the king, sorely wearied and wounded, although but slightly, in a score of places, yielded his place to Zalos and the Lord Patrymion. The lad took the shield of the king, and knelt with his spear at the turn of the passage. Behind him the stout captain plied a ponderous woodsman's ax with both hands, and the battle went on.

An unexpected circumstance ended the conflict. Several of the Sardanians on the cliffside with their long ladders discovered a ledge some forty feet above the opening into the cave and scrambled to it. On the ledge lay a number of large boulders, masses that had rolled down and rested there perhaps in age before.

With much labor and prying with spear-hafts, the men brought down several of the smaller rocks to the lip of the ledge. Poising one of them where, as nearly as they could judge, it would fall straight into the passage below, they waited for a lull in the fight. When they saw the pass clear of their fellows, they loosed the big stone with a shout.

Down it crashed, but, aimed too far to the left, missed the cleft and struck on the cliff-face with such force that a part of it flew to splinters. The main mass bounded through the air, struck again at the edge of the plateau, and thundered down the slope, carrying three if Analos's fighting men with it.

Unheeding the cries of their fellows from below to desist, the men on the ledge poised another boulder with better aim. It smashed into the rock corridor so near to the turn that the wind from it blew hard in the face of the Lord Patrymion, looking forth, and it struck the spear from his grasp and shattered it.

Up sprang the lad with a loud laugh.

"Now there's an end to this pleasant business of fighting," he said to Zalos, and pointed to the fallen rock. It lay wedged in the passage, jammed against the sides, and breast high, a natural barrier, stronger than the shield of Minos. One active man might hold the pass against any number, as long as he held strength to thrust, for room was left for but one man to pass over the rock at a time, and in no position for fighting.

Outside the plateau the Sardanians also had seen this new guardian in the narrow way, and reviled their fellows on the ledge for their lack of thought.

Nevertheless, they made one more attempt. They fetched up the slope a long and heavy timber of hymanan wood. Fixing an ilium-bar the thickness of two spear-hafts across the crevice, they slung the beam from it with a stout rope. Twenty men then seized the bar and swung the battering-ram against the boulder until they were weary. Every blow did but fix the rock firmer. All efforts to ram it in to where it might fall into the wider portion of the passage failed. They gave it up.

"Here we may stay now until we be old and gray-headed, Zalos," said Patrymion ruefully. "There can be no more fighting worth the telling. They cannot come at us. A puny girl could withstand them all here." He peered over the rock. "Aye, they know it, the rogues, and are going. 'Twill be but poor sport here." To himself he added: "I know a better, even though it lasteth but a few moments. What's the odds?"

Carried away by the love of fighting, a madness seemed to seize the lad. He let fall the shield of Minos, caught Zalos's ax from his hand, and before any man could hinder, he leaped over the rock.

"'Tis a pretty weapon," he called back over his shoulder to the hunter, and shook the ax aloft. "I will use it well." He ran out across the plateau singing loudly.

Unmindful of the danger, the hunter captain clambered over the rock to follow him. It was too late. For an instant Zalos saw the lad outlined clearly in the glare from the fire on the plateau, swinging the great ax with both hands. Then the spearsmen closed in on him from all sides. Four men he felled with four lightning strokes, and went down, dying as he had lived, with careless song on his lips, making a jest of death itself.

A storm of spears fell about the hunter as he emerged into the light, and he was fain to scramble back into the passage and over the rock to save his own skin.

Utterly exhausted, Minos, when he left the battle, had entered the cave and thrown himself on a couch to regain breath and strength for further combat. His hunters dressed his wounds and chafed his numbed sword-arm. First to reach him with water and bandages was Memene, but when she saw that his injuries were light and that he was merely tired, she gave way to the men and went back to her carved chair. But as she sat, one of her feet was ever tapping softly.

After a time came Zalos, and told his story to the king. Minos stood up and called for wine. When the beaker was fetched, he bowed low toward the rocky entrance, raising one hand in silent salute, and drank.

"To whom dost thou drink a toast, King Minos?" asked the girl, who noted all with curious eyes.

"To a brave man gone from among us," he replied gravely; "to a very brave man, to the Lord Patrymion."

Around the rocky headland, and into the cove swung the *Minnetonka*. The cove afforded the cruiser a safe harbor, storm-protected and free from ice. Down swung the boats from their davits, filled with eager men. For the first time shouting American sailors set foot on the shore where, more than two thousand years before, the little band of Achaeans had left the wreck of their ancient trireme, and pushed on into the unknown wilderness to find and people Sardanes.

Scoland, from the wireless room on the cruiser's deck, released the electric current that sent a splitting, chattering call out along the air-waves to the north. Nor was that call long unanswered.

Loaded with supplies and coal, the staunch old ship *Felix*, which Scoland had commanded on his previous polar dash, had left America before the *Minnetonka*. The faster cruiser had passed the *Felix* on the sea-road, but she had tolled sturdily along, and was now in harbor at the upper end of Ross Sea to wait what might befall; the *Felix* and her wireless constituted the one link that joined the Sardanian relief expedition to the outer world.

In the second boat to the shore went Polaris Janess and his dogs. The son of the snows was moccasined and furred, and ready to try conclusions with the worst that the white wildernesses had to put forth against him, the wildernesses that once had been his home. He wore the garments of white bearskin that had kept the warmth in his body in his great dash to the north.

His hair of red-gold had now grown long and hung again to his shoulders. Except that time and the perils through which he had passed had marked his face a thought more grave, he was the same indomitable young man who once had fought his way across the drift-ice in this selfsame cove, when the fiends from the sea deeps, the killer whales, had striven in vain to make a meal of him, and his Rose maid had stood on the snowy shore and called encouragement to him in his fight.

Beside Polaris in the boat was seated the short, wide figure of Zenas Wright. His white hair shone from under a shapeless cap of lynx fur from the Hudson Bay country. He was buttoned to the ears in a suit of mackinaw wool with a furred parka. Like the young man, he had a pair of snowshoes slung at his back. He, too, was determined to

tread the white pathway to Sardanes.

Polaris had done his best to dissuade the aged scientist from the attempt, and Scoland had added his plea. The determination of the old man to go with Polaris had seemed a particular annoyance to the captain. Zenas Wright would listen to neither argument nor entreaty.

"In my time I've put my name on one or two spots on the map," he said, "but I would rather have it erased than to miss my share in this expedition. I'm going to see this Sardanes of yours, my son, if I have to leave my old bones there. I was responsible for your coming down here. Now I'm going in with you. You are not going to take all the risks alone. Don't try to stop me. My mind's made up, and I'm obstinate as a Tennessee mule."

Ashore with them went the ship's carpenters with tools and lumber to establish a winter camp. A number of shacks were knocked together. More sledges and dogs were taken ashore. Within a couple of days a small but noisy settlement had sprung up on the bay shore. Men and beasts, confined for many weary weeks to the cramped quarters aboard the cruiser, were glad, indeed, to have the chance to be ashore and move about freely, bleak as the place was. Shouts and barks arose joyously where for untold centuries few voices had been heard except those of many-tongued Nature herself.

Sure that his wireless connections with the *Felix* were in working order, and that the crew of the supply ship had chosen a safe harbor, where he could find them, Captain Scoland also went ashore, and threw himself energetically into the details of camp making.

Never a talkative man, the tall captain had grown, in the-latter days of their voyaging, more taciturn than ever. Morose and moody, for hours at a lame he never opened his lips except for the giving of orders, and they were more sharp and stern than even was his wont. His associates had been quick to notice those things, but laid them to the cares and dangers of their enterprise. In one thing the captain was not lacking. That was a great capacity for work. Scarcely a detail of the work on board the cruiser or ashore went forward without his personal supervision.

Seeing that the heart of Zenas Wright was firm set on making the trip inland to Sardanes, Polaris, with inward impatience, was forced to delay the immediate start he had premeditated. Once started, the going would be swift as they were capable of, and it would be a cruelty to expect the older man, unused for years to snow travel, to keep up the pace on snowshoes.

While others of the party were busy with the camp building, Polaris and the scientist spent hours on the snow slopes, and made a number of short trips over the ridge to the east. As the young man had foreseen, Wright's first experience with the shoes nearly crippled him. In the course of a couple of days, however, his joints and muscles were limbered to the labor, and he was able to make surprising progress, proving his boast that he was an adept snow runner.

Scoland, whom previous years to both Arctic and Antarctic regions had made expert in the management of dogs, selected himself a team from the huskies, and took a sudden interest in snow journeying, an activity that nearly cost the expedition dearly.

On the second day after their arrival at the cove, a man came ashore from the *Minnetonka* with a message for the captain from Aronson on the *Felix*. The message bearer failed to find Scoland at the shacks. When Polaris and Zenas Wright came in later, at the end of their day's exercise, the captain was still missing. They had not seen him. Dogs and sledge which the captain had been using were missing also.

"Either he is strayed and lost in the snow, or some manner of mishap has befallen," said Polaris. "I will go and find him."

Turning his own beasts, he set out at once to study the tangle of snow trails that led inland from the camp. There had been no snow and little wind for a number of days, so it was an easy matter for him to read the paths. Starting from the ridge at the back of the cove, he swung out in a long loop, whose farther curve took him five miles or more

from the camp. Four trails he crossed that were plainly back-trailed. The fifth snow path that he came to led on into the wilderness, with no evidence of a return, and he followed that.

Along the foothill slopes of the icy barrier mountains the land lay comparatively level, except for the rocky hummocks that were everywhere sprinkled. A few miles to the south of the range, low rolling hills began again, extending as far as eye might see. Into the hills Scoland's trail lay. Some six miles from where Polaris first picked up the path, he found the captain.

Where a deep and jagged crevasse yawned beneath its treacherous coverlet of snow crust, the trail ended. Where the crust had broken under their weight, men and dogs and sledge had disappeared into the depths.

Outspanning and tethering his own team to a rock, the son of the snows crept forward cautiously to the brink of the chasm.

Scarcely a yard below the level of the broken snow bridge, Scoland's sledge was caught fast between two projecting teeth of rock and hung over the crevasse. Head downward in their harness, and frozen stiff and dead, dangled the carcasses of two of the captain's huskies. Below them the forward harness hung in strips. Peering into the lower deep of the crevasse, as his eyes became accustomed to its gloom, Polaris could make out the mass of fallen snow from the bridge. It lay forty feet below him on the floor of the crevasse, which extended away to either side, in an irregular corridor rock-walled and carpeted with snow. Of the man and the other dogs he could see nothing.

He shouted, and his heart leaped gladly, when, faint and weak and faraway, came an answering halloo, followed immediately by the howling of dogs. Scoland lived!

Lengths of thin, stout rope were part of the equipment of every sledge, and with each a small steel pulley for hauling. Polaris sprang to his sledge and fetched his tackle.

Testing every inch of the rock with his utmost strength, he crept over the lip of the crevasse, whipped a short, bight of rope about one of the rocks that held the wreck of Scoland's sledge swung his pulley and threaded it. Of rope he had nearly a hundred feet, so that, doubled, it reached the floor of the crevasse, and to spare. He did his work in haste.

Within five minutes of the time of Scoland's answering hail from the depths, Polaris went down the doubled rope hand under hand, and set foot on the crevasse bottom. He shouted again, and again received a faint answer, away to the south in the windings of the crooked corridor. He started that way, and had gone but a few steps when whimpering and howling, two of the captain's dogs came floundering through the snow to meet him.

When Scoland broke through the crust he had been running with the dogs ahead of his sledge. He had pitched downward with the mass of falling snow, and landed, badly shaken but uninjured, on the floor of the crevasse. He saw at once that it would be impossible at the point where he fell to scale the height of the crevasse wall. The corridor-like fissure, extending south, took an upward course. The captain followed its windings in that direction, hoping that it would lead again to the surface.

Another mishap had made his case almost hopeless. A break in the rocky floor, masked by snow, yawned across the entire width of the chasm. In the half darkness, Scoland had reached its edge. Too late he felt the snow slipping from beneath his feet, and fell again. He had found himself in a pocket some eight feet deep, its sides so sheer that he could not climb them. Vainly he explored every inch of the walls at either side, and tore at the rocks until his hands bled, in an effort to gain a hold. His struggles only brought exhaustion. Three of his huskies had taken the leap, the other two remaining in the upper corridor.

Utterly worn out, the captain at length had curled himself up with the beasts. The warmth of their bodies alone had held the life in his body, for the cold was deadly. Dogs and man were waiting for slow death when they heard the hail of Polaris.

Flat on his stomach, Polaris crawled to the edge of the break in the floor. Cramped and chilled, Scoland was barely able to stand and stagger to the wall. Polaris reached down and found that he could grasp Scoland's

upstretched arms between wrists and elbows. Turning on his back, the son of the snows exerted his mighty sinews. Scoland hung almost a dead weight, but he raised him. Up, up, slowly, carefully, and then over the edge, and the captain lay gasping beside him.

On his face again, Polaris called encouragement to the huskies. Barking loudly, the dogs sprang high, leaping repeatedly at the face of the wall. One by one, the man caught them in the air as they leaped, and raised them to the upper floor.

Half carrying the exhausted Scoland, Polaris hurried along the passage to the ropes, and made him fast. Fearing that the captain was too weak to effect his own release from the tackle, Janess climbed the rope to the lip of the chasm. Again he exerted his tireless strength and hauled the other to the surface.

Scoland rolled weakly into the snow.

"Brandy," he muttered; "there's a flask in the back of the sledge. Can you reach it?"

Polaris found and fetched the flask. Scoland took a long pull at the fiery spirit. Seeing Janess about to lower himself over the rock again, he asked:

"What are you going to do?"

"Fetch up the dogs," Polaris answered.

"Let the damned brutes go, and get me back to the camp. I'm nearly all in."

Polaris eyed him narrowly.

"Not so," he said shortly. "They are good dogs. Were it not for three of them I think you would not now be living." He slipped down the side of the crevasse.

Scoland sneered. He lay watching the straining rope. It seemed to fascinate him. His hand crept to the knife at his belt. Slowly he drew it, and laid its keen blade against the rope. A wave of weakness came over him. Alone, he could never reach the camp. He put away the knife.

One by one Polaris brought up the huskies. He placed Scoland on his own sledge and drove back to the camp, leaving the wreck to be recovered later.

Not one word of thanks did Scoland speak to him for his deliverance. All the way back to the camp the captain lay on the sledge with closed eyes. All the way he cursed furiously within himself that it should be his fortune to take his life at the hands of this one man of all men.

No more was battle done on the steep slope of Mount Latmos. Assured that Minos and his men were holed in where they might not come at them, the fighting men of the priest went up against the cave no more. Although they must have known that the treasure cave was provisioned and watered so abundantly that it would keep its small garrison for many months, they did not give up their siege entirely. That was discovered when one of the hunters thought to go forth by stealth in the slumber hours, and pay a visit to his wife and children at his home in the valley. Hardly was he over the ledge of the plateau when men seized him in the dusk.

His comrades in the cave above heard him scream out once and twice, and then the minions of Analos cut his throat.

On their part, the hunters maintained a guard of one man at all hours, who sat behind the boulder in the passageway.

Late in the fourth day that they had been immured in the mountainside, Dukulon, one of Zalos's men, as he

stood his turn at guard, heard a rapping at the mouth of the pass as one who tapped gently on the wall with a stone.

"Who cometh?" he hailed.

"*Sh*—it is I, Alternes," came the whispered answer. "I would have speech with Minos the king."

Minos came and bade the lad enter the cave. He wriggled slowly, and with not a few groans, through the passage, and was helped over the rock. When they took him to the light, they found that he was in evil case. Most of his clothing had been torn from him, and he was bruised and with dried blood on his flesh.

"They have hunted me in the hills like a goat," he gasped, as he bent to kiss the hand of his master. "Thy palace is a dismal ruin, O king. Thy servants are scattered or slain. The stone with thy name on it has been cast down from above thy seat in the Judgment House. Even thy throne they toppled from its place and shattered."

The king turned from him sorrowfully. The hunters gathered round, and, as they tended the hurts of the lad, they sought news from him of their families.

"I can tell you naught," he said wearily, "but I believe that every soul in the valley that stood faithful to the king hath been sent to Hephaisstos. The dead lie unburned in rows on the upper terraces of the Gateway. For in the hill the fires of the god do wax so mighty that none, not even his own priests, dares to come near to them. All upper Sardanes is snow and ice. Ten of the great moons have gone dark, and as they die the cold cometh on apace."

Then Alternes turned his face to the wall on the couch of skins where they had laid him, and slept long and well.

One more attempt Analos made to bring Minos to his will. The priest sent a delegation of all the lords of the valley to the cave mouth. Minos came and talked with them over the fallen rock. To his side came the Lady Memene and leaned upon the stone, her chin upon her hands.

Ukalles, now an outcast from his home on Tanos in upper Sardanes, was spokesman for the nobles.

"We are sore beset of troubles, O Minos!" he cried. "The priest saith the land is doomed to the anger of the Lord Hephaisstos, and day by day the doom marcheth. Thou dost stand against it and lure it on the people and on all of us, saith Analos. Wilt not yield to the god, and not let this fair valley perish, that hath stood for ages? Consider, for the people's sake—the people whom once thou didst love so well, and who love thee. It is promised thee that thou shalt not die if thou dost yield. Thou must, indeed, go to the Gateway and submit to what decree of punishment the god maketh, but not to death. Come, ere that we hold dear be gone, and Sardanes be blotted out."

"Strange is the love the people bear their king," answered Minos calmly. "Strange, indeed, when they have slain my servants, laid my palace in ruins, and stricken my very name from the seat of my fathers—"

"But that was by orders of the god through his priests," broke in Ukalles.

"Right well I know that so ye are deluded to believe," replied the king. "Yet were those orders from the priests carried out by hands and hearts of those who once were my people. Minos hath no people more, save these few faithful ones who abide with him, risking all.

"Now list thee, Ukalles and all of those with thee, for this is the last word of Minos. Once, before he did send his spearmen against me, I did tell this Analos that, were Minos convinced for one little moment that by any sacrifice, however great, he could avert that which falleth on the valley, that sacrifice he would make, and hesitate not. Of such is Minos not convinced. Not of the god are the rumblings of the hills, the dying fires and the coming of the snows."

"Thou blasphemest," Ukalles shouted in anger, "and in thy madness dost bring doom on us all. My curse and that of all these, and of the people, the priests and the great Hephaisstos, lieth on thee, if thou dost not yield thee to his grace."

"Curse on, thou fool," was Minos's answer. "I mind thy curses as little as the wind that bloweth. If this god of

thine be great and powerful, as thou sayest, and as the priests do preach, how is it that he doth allow me, one man alone, to stand in his divine path? Why hath he not come hither and plucked me from my place and bent or broken me to his will?"

Minos raised his hand on high with the great sword shining in it.

"I, Minos, king in Sardanes until the end, do defy this Hephaistos. Hath he need of such as thou and Analos to do his will for him, he is no cause for fear. Away, ye superstition-ridden dullards, and run your mad pace through. Minos yieldeth not. He defieth all of you. Your god cometh not, nor will come, because—*there is no god!*"

Shaking and trembling in the fears aroused by the king's defiance, the nobles turned to go. Only Karnaon stood out from among them.

"Memene, my daughter, leave thou this madman and come to me," he called. "Come, girl. Thy father commandeth thee."

"And I, my father, do disobey thee," said the girl.

"Then take thou thy father's bitter curse," Karnaon shouted. He stamped his foot in his anger.

"That thou didst give me once, O father, when thou didst send me to the Gateway to marry the foul priest," answered Memene. "That is neither forgotten nor forgiven thee."

"Thou art no more daughter of mine," Karnaon said between his set teeth. Then he, too, turned away and followed the others down the steep hill, walking heavily.

Slowly the nobles crossed the valley and the river and took their tidings to Analos at the Gateway.

At the top of the pathway to the first terrace, the high priest met them, escorted by the black robed company that served the mighty altar of Hephaistos. When he saw that they brought no royal captives with them, and heard the tale of the defiance Minos had hurled at the ancient god, his anger rose and choked him so that he answered them nothing. He stood and heard them through, his hands clenched under his robe so that the nails of his fingers bit into his palms.

For a time he stood so. Then he rent his black robe from him, tearing it to shreds, and in his red paraphernalia of death ran up the terraces like a flame. In a room in his own house on the upper terrace he threw himself on the marble floor and writhed and rolled and tore at his black beard, gone clean mad with impotent rage. When one of his priests came to consult him, he leaped in frenzy, and slew the man with one stroke of a stone vase, then hid the body and went forth, somewhat calmed.

As he passed his threshold, a roaring smote upon his ears. From the lofty arched portal built against the side of the cliff gushed a tide of molten lava as wide as the river Ukranis. The fire-lake had risen until it overflowed the ledge and poured down through the spiral passage that led from the temple of death to the upper terrace.

Out from the carved portal flowed the fiery torrent, hissing and snapping. Right in its path lay the rows of dead Sardanians, awaiting the rites of Hephaistos, their quiet faces upturned and ghastly in the baleful radiance reflected down on them from the flaming hill-crown. One moment they lay there in their still lines, and then the seething flood passed over them and licked them up.

On it poured, and crept over the brink of the terrace, and down in a fearful cascade, setting fire to the forest on the side of the holy hill. The force of the torrent soon abated, and the lava lay as though some terrible serpent had crept forth from the depths of the earth and stretched itself adown the terraces. For hours it glowed before it cooled into dross and ashes. The fire in the forest spread, until half the mountain was aflame, and the lower end of the valley presented a spectacle of unearthly splendor.

That flood of lava was a spurt of the very heart's blood of the valley. Even as it jetted from the side of the Gateway, half way up the valley's rim three more of its volcanic guardians gave up their fiery ghosts, and the cold grip of the Antarctic took hold of their gaping throats.

Undaunted by the fury that raged on the Gateway to the Future, Analos would not desert his post on the upper terrace. All of the other priests he drove from him, bidding them abide below with the stricken people until such time as he should summon them to him again. He stayed alone with his god.

More days of terror passed. The red priest from the flaming hill and Minos the king from his lair on Mount Latmos watched the march of winter down the valley.

CHAPTER V

THE WARNING OF THE LAST MOON

When Nature issues a decree, the execution thereof is pitiless. She reckes naught of dynasties or nations. When she would have a clean page on which to write, she erases, if needs be, and with inexorable completeness, the fairest characters she may have inscribed previously. The smallest and the greatest, the tiny grass blade, the towering forest giant, the lowly anthill, the lofty mountain, the blind worm in the dust, proud man, the "lord of Creation"—be any or all of these in her path. Nature breaks them, and, with her ally, Time, makes smooth the page for her next writing.

Only those who are wise and instructed may pore over such an erasure and, from a faint trace here, a blur there, partly read and partly guess at that which once was writ.

Years uncounted, Sardanes had flourished in the wastes of the Southland. Then, the great All-Mother, always unhurried, drew a steadfast white finger across the valley.

Only a fortnight elapsed from the day on which the Gateway to the Future sent forth its first flare of fire, that followed centuries in which it had been dark—only a brief fortnight, and the Gateway alone of all the volcanic ring still sent fire and smoke heavenwards. All the sister hills lay silent and lifeless, their furious spirits spent and gone elsewhere, their seamed summits crowned with the white of Antarctic snows.

First to yield was the holy river Ukranis. Ice bound its sources until it became a mere streamlet, soon paralyzed by the cold into a glittering thread. A gray rime crept over the green velvet of the grass, and a white pall covered it softly. The blue roses withered and fell. The grain in the fields ceased to grow and lay lifeless. Bushes and shrubs died. The giant trees shed their faded foliage, their roots strangled in the chill of death, their palsied branches brittle and breaking down under a weight of snow. The bright birds of many hues that had flashed back and forth through the forest glades and lanes fluttered to the ground with mournful cries and died. The hum of insect life was stilled. On the hillsides, the little brown rabbits shivered in their burrows, nestled together and slept forever.

With all of these, there passed a hundred things, animate and inanimate, that had their living like in no other spot on the whole earth.

Only man and his closest companions lingered. At the foot of the terraced hill of Hephaistos all of Sardanes that still lived were gathered—all, with the exception of Minos the king and his company on the hill of Latmos.

At the north end of the valley, with their backs to the last of the flaming hills and their faces towards the encroaching snows, the Sardanians pitched a great camp. Some few small houses that once had been those of the tillers of the fields, were occupied by the lords and their families. The people, nearly two thousand of them, camped on the ground with blankets and furs and some articles of their wooden household furniture, each little family in its own group.

Against the creeping white enemy that had invaded the valley, they set a barrier of flame. A hundred axmen, working in shifts, with as many ponies, cut and dragged trees from near-by hillsides. Hour after hour they piled the fires with wood from the hymanan forests, and kept a blazing ring around the camp. When one party was wearied, another took up the work.

So, with hope departing, they kept life in their bodies for a few days.

To that end of the valley were brought all of the small horses in the kingdom, to the number of several hundreds. There was not enough fodder to maintain the poor animals for long, and they died by the score. The slopes of the Gateway swarmed with wild goats; driven thither with all the rest by the sinister white invader that had crept to their loftiest haunts in the cliffs, and had cut them off from their food supplies. They and the horses were all that remained of animal life in Sardanes, except the dogs of Minos on Latmos.

Bitter as was the exigency, Analos the priest would not suffer the people to ascend to the terraces of the Gateway, where was still some warmth from within the hill. So strong was the grip of their superstitions and his threats, that, shivering, facing death and desperate, the people still heeded and obeyed him.

Analos, guardian of the portals of the Gateway, dwelt alone with the majesty of his god, save for the wild goats, which cared naught for orders, priest or god.

Watch was kept no longer at the mouth of the cavern where Minos and his party lay. Well it was for them that it was so, else they had perished of cold. No longer was the cave tenable without fire. Like the people below in the valley, the refugees were forced to work in shifts of axmen to keep the lives within them. In the cave a fire roared constantly, and another without on the plateau.

Analos had given up his battle against the king. It was by his orders that his spearmen kept watch at the cave no longer. His fiery spirit was burning itself out within him, and he was turning cold, as the lifeless hills turned cold. It seemed to him that his will roamed through the chambers of his mind, and in them could find no more of anger against Minos; nor could it conjure up, as it had been wont to do, more terrible behests of the god Hephaistos. Chaos had come to Analos, and let it come, said he, for no more might he read the mind of his mighty master and interpret his wishes.

On the Gateway he dwelt alone and in a daze, and waited, waited, for he knew not what. But he was to see one more vision—wild as any his madness ever brought to him.

He hardly ever slept. Hour by hour he paced the paths of the upper terrace, before the carven portal of the cliff, until there came a day when he found that he could enter the winding way that led to the ancient temple of death online crater ledge.

On the stone steps of the sanctuary the priest laid himself, worn out with his vigil, and there sleep bound him fast. For hours he slumbered oh. He awoke with a great start of horror, the fear of a half-remembered dream, a monstrous vision. He rushed to the brink of the sheer ledge.

Hundreds of feet below him writhed the fiery lake, wafting upwards its roseate mists and vapors, as it had for centuries. It was once more at its ancient level—*or was it below?* He stared; and as he gazed, it seemed to him that, inch by inch, very slowly, the seething maelstrom was sinking!

Suddenly realization came to him. The flaming crown of the Gateway was gone. The fires of the Gateway were going!

Poised at the ledge's brink, he flung wide his arms. "Hephaistos! Hephaistos! Master, whither goest thou?" he shrieked. The dull rumble of the fires, the sighing of the wind in the mighty cone, the soft curling reek of the fire mists drifting by him were his only answer. Came the thought of those below in the valley, and he rushed from the temple and passed down the terraces.

Already snow was falling on their green declivity.

His appearance on the side of the mountain was greeted with a shivering moan from the people. When the Gateway had gone dark, and new terror had assailed them, they still had held to the word of the priest. No one of them set foot on the holy hill. Quaking, they crowded together at its foot and waited the coming of Analos. A

thousand eyes were upon him as he went down the terraces—not the arrogant, masterful man they always had known him, but a bowed and silent figure, walking with folded arms and eyes cast down, great eyes that glowed but dimly in their caverns. Even so, he was still the master—and still mad.

As he paused on the lowermost terrace, they crowded closely about him. A nation held its breath and waited for his words. He raised his head and his gaze swept over the close ranks of the people. He held out his arms toward them in silence for a moment before he spoke.

"A message I bear to his people from the mighty Lord Hephaistos," he said clearly. "Patience for but a little time, and he shall hear it. But first I must go to Latmos. Take me thither."

Six strong men made a litter and carried him, fighting their way through snow almost knee-deep, to the plateau on Latmos.

Hunters of the king, laboring at their fire on the plateau, saw the party on its way. One of them summoned Minos.

"The red priest hath come again from the Gateway," he shouted into the cave.

Armed and ready, Minos the king came forth, but laid his weapons down when he saw only six unarmed and gloomy men. Analos clambered from his litter and faced him.

"Once more, and this the last time of all, cometh Analos, priest of Hephaistos, to look upon thy face, thou Minos, who wast king," he said. "Nay, answer me not in anger, for I speak not in anger or bitterness," he continued quickly, when the king would have replied. "Hear me through. That which hath passed between us, let it pass and be past. No longer beareth Analos command of his god to do harm to thee or thine."

He raised his arm and pointed to the south up the valley. Minos saw that the arm trembled, and the man was swaying.

"Sardanes lieth dead," the priest went on. "Life cometh to the valley no more, for the god goeth hence forever, and leaveth all things behind him as doubtless they were before he came in the ancient days and made his home and guided hither his chosen people.

"Yonder in the Gateway, the god tarryeth to take with him his faithful ones. He groweth impatient, for even there the fires fail apace—"

"How meanest thou?" Minos broke in.

"This; that, with the passing of the god shall pass every soul in Sardanes. Analos goeth hence to the Gateway to muster his people. With music and singing and rejoicing shall they follow the ancient god through the Gateway to the Future, to what new, far land of promise he hath prepared for them."

The king drew a quick breath, but held his peace. Leaning on the shoulders of two of his bearers, for his strength waned, Analos turned his somber eyes on the hunters.

"Ye men of Minos," he said, and his voice was almost gentle, "come yet with all the rest, I pray you. Your people await you, with your wives and your little ones. It is in the mind of Analos that, because ye have been faithful to your master in his folly, the punishment therefor shall not fall on you. Much may be forgiven a loyal servant, even though he setteth his master before his god. Analos biddeth you come, for time groweth short, and darkness falleth.

"And thou, O Minos, come thou also, an indeed thou wilt. I know not what shall be meted out to thee of the god's mercy. Perchance thy punishment shall be most passing bitter. That is in the hands of Hephaistos, and no more in those of Analos, his servant. Analos hath no further hate for thee in his heart, or for the maid Memene. Come ye both, if ye are so minded, in peace and with these others. Analos hath spoken."

"Priest, thou art mad still," replied Minos, "but not so mad as once thou wert. The valley lieth dead indeed, and Minos knoweth not if ever it will bloom again. Thou mayest bend the people to thy crazed mind's fancy. Minos

bendeth not. Here will he await the end, until the end."

Before the king had quit speaking, the priest fell wearily into his litter, and at a sign from his hand, his men started down the slopes through the snow.

On the day following the misadventure of Captain Scoland, Polaris and Zenas Wright, all their preparations made, set forth on the road to Sardanes.

Latter-day science has contributed much to the safety and comfort of the explorer. On the sledge of the adventurers was packed in small space a supply of provisions for both men and animals that would last them for a month, yet which did not constitute too great a weight for the dogs to draw. The sledge itself was far higher than the old affair of wood with which the son of the snows had set out on his previous perilous trips. Wherever lightness would not detract from the strength to withstand straining, the vehicle was constructed of aluminum.

The travelers were armed heavily. Ill would it go with any shape of man or beast that should cross their path with threatening intent. From the belt of Polaris swung a brace of automatic pistols of the heaviest caliber. Strapped handily on the sledge were three high-powered rifles. Old Zenas Wright contented himself with one pistol, like those of his companion.

Not all of the trappings of the younger man were the product of civilization. He carried in his hand a stout spear of his own workmanship. On that, and on the long knife at his side, he depended, in a pinch, fully as much as he did on the guns.

Farewells were soon said at the camp, a ceremony which Scoland was not on hand to participate in. Polaris laid out his harness, inspanned his seven dogs, with big Boris in the lead, and cracked his long whip. From shore and ship a cheer went up as the dogs sprang forward. The two wayfarers responded with waves of their hands, then bent their backs to the toll of the road, vanished over the crest of the ridge, and were gone.

For years more than twice the span of Polaris's life, Zenas Wright had been an active and athletic man. He had made no empty boast when he had said that he was a traveler of parts, and able to hold his own on any path. If the pace they set was not quite as swift as Polaris might have maintained alone, it was far from slow, and the old explorer kept it up tirelessly and uncomplaining.

Mile after mile fell behind the flying feet of the agile beasts and gliding men. Occasionally they stopped and made brief camp, but the pressure of their errand spurred them to the limit of endurance. Weather favored them. They met no biting tempests with blinding snows to confuse and delay them. Lack of clear light was their only serious obstacle. The skies remained overcast and leaden, and no golden sun rays came to point their way.

"More light I could wish for gladly," said Polaris, "but I think the very instinct within me will not let me lose this road."

Often he scanned the horizon to the south, frequently halting the dogs and ascending to the summit of craggy snow hummock or low hill, with which the great plain was besprinkled. He also studied continually the formation of the ice-clad barrier range to their left, its sinister peaks in silhouette against the sky.

Used for years to fix his bearings by the landmarks set by nature, the eye of the snow dweller was photographic, his memory unerring. At length he found the path he sought. Spying afar from the crest of a craggy eminence, he noted the combination of contour and surroundings that told him they were near to the end of their journey.

He swung the dog team from the eastward course, and veered away to the south. Soon they came to a long depression, that wound southward among the low hills, in much the semblance of a sometime traveled highway.

With kindling eye, Polaris pointed down the reaches of its sinuous-course.

"Yonder, old man, stretches the Hunters' Road, and Sardanes lies at its farther end!" he cried. "In a few more

hours we shall know the best or worst of this long trip of ours."

Even with the aid of the powerful glasses carried by Zenas Wright, Polaris could not pierce the distances to where the volcanic hills lay around the valley.

"If all were well, there should be at least some flare of fires against this dull sky," he muttered, "yet I see none."

Guiding the dogs into the road, Polaris urged them on at a pace faster than any they had yet taken, for he knew that this path was free from obstacles or pitfalls. As they came nearer to their goal, both men grew taciturn. Zenas Wright was absorbed with the food for thought that his eager old eyes supplied him. Polaris was oppressed with a prescience of tragedy. Why were there no fires on the horizon, and why no signs of travel on the white reaches of the Hunters' Road?

Once more they camped against a bluff cliff at a turn in the road, and then went on again. First with the glasses, and then with their eyes alone, they picked upon the dim outlines of the Sardanian mountain ring, dull white against the dun skies. Polaris shook his head gloomily.

"Much my heart does misgive me, old Zenas Wright," he said, "for I fear we are too late. Green, yon hills should be, and dark at their summits, but they are white. The breeze blows from them to us, but is tempered with no warmth. I fear that the great calamity which your science has foretold is complete, and that all Sardanias is passed away."

As they drew nearer to the mountain ring, out to their left across the snowfields, they saw the evidences of a mighty disturbance of the face of the earth. Hills riven in twain, tremendous fissures and pits marked a long, wide scar that extended from the base of the hills and reached northward farther than they could see.

"Some giant force has passed that way," Polaris said, "the like of which I never saw in these lands. It is not unlike the track of a giant's sledge across the face of the country. How do you read it?"

"It is the path taken by the volcanic fires on their way from here to where we found them blazing on Ross Sea," Zenas Wright answered. "As they tore their way through the channels opened to them, they writhed and shook the earth and rock above them, and left this appearance when they had gone. That would have been a sight worth watching and study. The earth out there must have pitched and tossed like waves of the sea."

He paused, and his face was very solemn.

"I, too, am afraid that it's all no use," he said slowly. "That seam out there is cold, or there would be a fog above it so thick we could not trace it. That means that the fires have been gone for some time. It looks bad. But let us hurry on and see for ourselves."

They reached the north pass of Sardanias and found it half choked with snow where it always had been bare. It was a comparatively easy matter to sledge up and through it. Halfway up the pass the dogs balked and refused to go forward. Slinking and whining, the brutes skulked in their harness and cowered back against the sides of the sledge, nor would word or whip urge them on.

Hardly less keen than those of the animals themselves, the senses of the son of the snows soon warned him of the danger's nature. He sniffed at the air of the pass and turned smilingly to the scientist.

"A bear," he said, and then, contemptuously; "these dogs are of a poor spirit or we would have to hold them back rather than whip them on. Stay you here and try to quiet them. I will go on and clear the way."

He took a rifle from the sledge and laid down his spear, saying almost apologetically as he did so, "Well would I love to fight him after my old fashion and show you sport, but we haste, and have no time for sports."

Taking off his snowshoes and loosening the knife in his belt, Polaris ran forward around a turn of the rock.

Hardly had he disappeared when the air reechoed to a burst of horrid howling, followed by the spitting crack of the rifle.

Polaris found his foe a few rods up the pass, a lean old bear, almost toothless, his once snow-white coat rusted to a dingy yellow, his claws well worn. He was feeling his way cautiously down the snow-covered rocks. With the wind blowing from him, he had no warning of the presence of an enemy until he saw Polaris kneeling scarcely fifteen feet from him. Then he howled indeed. It was his last challenge. A bullet from the powerful rifle, truly aimed, plowed through his shaggy breast and found his heart.

Whipping out his knife, Polaris cut the throat of the huge beast and hacked a piece of flesh from its shoulder. He ran down the path again and threw the bloody fragment before the dogs.

"An old trick," he laughed. "They smell the blood, they taste it, and they fear no more."

Up through the pass the travelers drove their team, past the carcass of the bear, and stood at the lip of the valley slope. Sardanes lay before them. Zenas Wright groaned aloud. Polaris Janess threw wide his arms in a gesture of sorrow, and his face grew solemn with pity.

"*Gone*," he whispered; "men and women and children, and the wonders they wrought—gone, and the snows have covered all!"

As they, stood there, the Antarctic sun, freed at last from its cloud bonds, shot a sullen red ray over the hills and down the valley, and laid bare the full measure of the ruin. From the gleaming cap of the Gateway to the Future, to Mount Helior in upper Sardanes the valley was banked with snow, its mansions hidden, its fields and forests buried deep. Only on the higher slopes was evidence that life had ever been. There the giant hymanan trees still stood against the storms, their branches bleak and bare, thrust out above the white masses that covered more than half their mighty trunks. Behind them loomed the cliffs of the mountain ring, their sheer sides also splotched with white.

Some distance down the valley, Polaris fancied he could distinguish a mass bulking up in the snow that he deemed marked where the Judgment House stood.

"In the hollow of the Gateway hill, and in caves in the mountain sides, perchance there is that which will repay your visit somewhat, old man," Polaris said to the geologist. "All else is dead."

Before the old man could answer the dogs became suddenly uneasy, growling and snarling. Polaris bent forward and cupped his ear with his hand. A long-drawn howling floated across the valley from the western range. "More bears," he said, then started and turned a flashing eye on his companion.

"Come on, old Zenas Wright!" he cried. "More than bears are here. Yonder howl dogs also. Did I not know that my gray brothers were dead these many months, all but Marcus, I might swear I heard their own voices. But, where dogs are, there are men also. Here is a new riddle. Come!"

Urging the huskies, they shot down the snow crusts of the hillside and started across the valley.

When he reached the Gateway from his last visit to Mount Latmos, Analos despatched four men and a pony sledge to the deserted Judgment House to fetch to the hill of the god the huge drum of time. When it was brought, he appeared on the steps to the first of the terraces. His priests clustered about him in a black robed group.

He gazed down into the upturned faces of his people. At a signal, both priests and people knelt. For a space the crackling of the vast camp-fires was the only sound. Analos gathered his strength for what was to be his last speech. Never had man an audience more breathlessly attentive.

"Hephaistos calleth his children," the priest began, his voice hollow and solemn, his words falling slowly. "Through me, Analos, high priest in Sardanes, his life-long servant, he calleth. It is not for man to question the ways of the ancient god. Analos questioneth not. When his master calleth, he answereth, 'Whither thou leadest me, there

will I follow on.' I am ready. Are ye also ready, my people?"

In the pause that followed the question rose the voice of the Lord Ukalles of upper Sardanes. "Whither calleth the god, O master? Read thou his message to Sardanes."

Piercing clear the voice of the high priest in answer:

"To the Gateway to the Future calleth he his children, through the portals of the temple of death to the glory that lieth beyond, whither every Sardanian hath trod since the land was new."

A shiver passed through the kneeling ranks, and a whisper, half a moan, from two thousand human throats. Again spoke the Lord Ukalles: "Must this thing be, master? Is this the end? Is there no other way?"

"This thing must be," answered the red priest steadily. "There is no other way. This is the end in Sardanes. Be ye brave, all my people. In a far country, brighter even than the fair Sardanes ye have known, Hephaistos will welcome you. Think; since our forefathers came up from the seas to this place, no Sardanian ever hath lived, save one man only, but hath passed the Gateway when his time came. Without fear and without flinching have they passed whither the god beckoned them. And, if they died elsewhere, faithful friends brought them hither, and still they passed the portals. Thousands have gone this road. Will ye falter now, when the great god doth summon you to accompany him?"

Again he paused. From the people rose a many-voiced murmur, and its burden was, "We are ready, master, lead thou us on."

"The end hath struck, indeed," cried the Lord Ukalles. "Now is no time for words or thoughts, but to do the bidding of the god. It is fitting that the lords of Sardanes should take their proper station. Stand ye forth, my fellow nobles of the land, ye and yours."

In measured tones he called the roll of the mountains, omitting only Latmos, Epamon, and Lokalian. Minos dwelt on Latmos, Patrymion of Epamon and Garlaes of Lokalian had journeyed on before. Man by man the nobles answered and took their places at the foot of the terrace with their families. Brought face to face with doom, the people met it sad-eyed and silent, but unflinching.

"It is well," cried Analos. "The children of the god fear not. Form in procession, my people, as for a festival. Cast wood on the fires to light the way."

Under this direction the huge drum was hoisted to the first terrace.

"Beat the drum, Karthanon, while the people make ready," commanded Analos. Karthanon the Aged bared a withered arm and laid on with measured stroke. Below the drum gathered the trumpeters. To the blare and boom of the music the Sardanians formed their ranks.

"When all is ready, Analos leadeth," said the priest. He staggered to the steps that led to the second terrace, and prostrated himself in prayer, with his face on the lowest step.

Across the valley from in front of the cave on Latmos, Minos and his men and the Lady Memene watched these proceedings from afar. The hymanan forests were down or bare, and they could see clearly by the light of the fires that ringed the camp. When they saw the people marshaling on the slope at the foot of the Gateway, and the first booming stroke of the drum beat up to their ears across the intervening space, the hunters drew apart and conferred among themselves in low tones.

Then came Zalos, their leader, and knelt at the feet of the king.

Tears rolled down the face of the sturdy captain.

"Lord Minos the king, I have served thee faithfully for many years, thee and thy royal house," he said in a broken voice. "As long as there was fighting to be done for thee, I and these men of mine would have stood with thee until death found us all. But now there is no more fighting, and here is the end of all things. Yonder go our

people. With them are our wives, our fathers and mothers and children. At the gates of the temple of death do they stand and hold out their hands to us. Lord, think us not disloyal. We ask thee that we may join them and die with them. O king, if thou goest not also, let us go to them."

He bowed his head on Minos's hand, and wet it with his tears. The king raised him gently.

"Zalos, old friend and comrade, faithful and true hast thou been unto the end, thou and all these men, thy friends and mine. Now do I absolve thee from thy allegiance and bid thee farewell. Go—go freely, and where thy hearts are calling thee. Minos hath nothing to forgive of thee, and much to thank. Farewell." In the flickering of the fire, tears gleamed on the cheek of the king also.

One by one the men came to him and knelt and kissed his hand. As they were about to depart, they heard the lad Alternes crying out within the cave, and he climbed over the rock in the passage and staggered to the side of the fire. He was weak with illness. His cheeks flamed and his eyes shone bright with fever.

"I heard the drum calling me," he cried. "Ah, look, the people gather at the Gateway!" He pointed across the valley. "A great festival is toward."

"Aye, lad," said Zatos, "the festival of Death. Yonder all Sardanes is gathered to march through the Gateway."

For a moment the boy stared, wild-eyed.

"Why, then, must Alternes go, too!" he said. "Take me with thee, Zalos. Farewell, my king." He reeled toward Minos, but his strength gave way. He pitched on his face, and a stream of blood welled from his lips. Minos bent and laid his hand on the lad's head. At a sign, four of the hunters picked the boy up and wrapped him in his cloak.

"Take me with you," said the king. "It is his right.... Lady Memene, what of thee?" he asked. "Here is the end. Thy people march to their last long sleep before the darkness cometh. There on the Gateway are thy father and all thy house. Goest thou also?"

The girl gazed at him for a moment, while Zalos and the hunters waited on her answer. She drew herself up proudly.

"Memene goeth not," he said; "here will she await the end, whatever it may be."

The hunters raised their arms in silent salute to the king and the maid, then turned, bearing the lad among them, and ran down the hillside, the snow spurting from beneath their flying feet.

When they arrived at the Gateway their loved ones welcomed them, only to bid them farewell for a longer journey than any they had yet taken. For the procession was formed and on the move.

At its head, leaning on two of his servants, Analos the high priest passed up the terraces. Behind him strode the others of the company of Hephaistos. Two stalwart priests bore the drum of time, and Karthanon the Aged walked beside, smiting it as he went. After them came the nobles of the valley and their households, and then the concourse of the people, marching slowly and with raised faces.

As they set foot on the topmost terrace, the priests took up the chant of death, softly at first, and then with increasing volume. Voice after voice joined in the measured chant. The procession crossed the upper terrace, entered the lofty carved arch of the portal, and wound upward through the spiral passage to the edge of the Gateway's crater.

On the steps of the temple of death Analos took his stand, supporting himself against one of its pillars. The priests with the drum gathered before him.

"Forward without fear, children of Hephaistos!" he shouted. "Falter not! There waiteth the ancient god." He pointed to the brink of the ledge.

Firmly the trumpeters marched on, the red glow of the fire mists playing on their faces. They reached the brink, and they faltered not, and their trumpets sounded no more. On marched the nobles and the people, still singing as they marched. If any Sardanian, man or woman or child, blanched or cried out that day, the press of the people carried them on, the mighty chant drowned their voices. No coward turned back. Even a number of the small horses entered the hill with their masters, whinnying and nuzzling with their soft muzzles. They passed the Gateway with the rest.

Nearly the last of all came Zalos and his hunters. They carried with them the corpse of Alternes, who had not lived to reach the mountain.

At length it was done. Only the priests remained on the ledge. The reverberations of the smitten drum and the roaring of the fires in the fearful pit overbore their feeble chant.

"Forward, my brothers, true servants of the god!" cried Analos. "Forward, and I will follow you! Analos shall be the last of all, his duty done, his work complete."

With set faces, and bearing with them the drum of time, the members of the black-robed company advanced. Before the last stroke of Karthanon had ceased to echo through the hollows of the mountain, Analos stood alone. Staggering and weak, he, too, advanced. To his disordered fancy it seemed that the curling vapors before him were thick with passing souls.

Half the distance from the steps of the temple to the great hall he stumbled and fell. Faintness numbed his limbs.

His head swam dizzily.

"Hephaistos! Master," he cried to terror, "desert me not here! Strength! Grant me strength!"

He struggled madly. He clawed at the very rock of the floor, and dragged himself inch by inch toward the death he sought. His breath came in gasps. His jaw fell. The iron spirit of the man held back dissolution itself until his will was accomplished. Groping and crawling, he reached at last the polished chute in the rock, cut there by the priests centuries before and worn smooth by the passing of thousands of Sardanians.

"I thank thee, master," he sighed, content. He rolled into the chute, and his body shot downward and outward above the fiery lake. His red robe spread wide as he took the plunge, like the wings of some immense crimson bird swooping downward from a flaming sky to a blazing sea.

Minos the king stood by his fire on the hill of Latmos. With folded arms he stood, and the Lady Memene sat near to him on a log of hymanan wood cut for the burning. Their eyes strained across the white Sardinian valley. Both were silent. They saw the long procession of those about to die sweep up the fire-lighted steeps of the Gateway to the Future. They heard the chant of death from two thousand throats as the people marched across the upper terrace and through the gloomy portal of the cliff, to the music of the trumpeters and the booming of the drum of time.

When the last man had passed within, they still heard the muffled thunder of the drum. Then that ceased also. Strong spirited as were they both, their hearts seemed to stop with it.

"Now art thou and I and Kalin the last Sardanians in the living world," the king said. So he spoke, not knowing that under the rocks and the snows, many long leagues to the northward, Kalin, the priest, lay asleep where Polaris Janess had left him nearly two years before.

"That end is come which the priest preached and the people feared," he continued, "the end which Minos could not believe would come. Nor doth he believe yet, nor will so believe, that it is wrought of a god. Nature hath withdrawn her mercy, and all things in Sardanes die.

"Believing not, Minos hath tarried. Now he is a king no longer. He hath no people left to rule. Naught remaineth but a snow-swept valley which death hath touched."

From her seat on the log the girl arose. She stood in front of Minos, so close that her soft breath fanned his cheek. A slow, red flush that was not of the firelight overspread her features. Her dark eyes flashed like jewels. She spoke, and her heart was in her voice.

"Little of an that thou hast valued is left to thee, Lord Minos," she said. "Thy people have turned against thee and are gone. Thy home is a ruin. The fast-falling snows cover the land thou didst love well. Some few friends were faithful unto the death, but death came, and they left thee. All that thou hadst to lose, thou hast lost, save thy life, thy dogs yonder, and one other thing, which, perchance, thou wilt value but little. In all the world, Lord Minos, there is not one to take thee by the hand and call thee friend.

"This is the hour which Memene hath foreseen and awaited. Say not that thou art no more king, my Lord Minos. Thou art *my* king. It was my will to stand beside thee when all the rest had passed—to tell thee that with thee I fear no danger and no death. I love thee, Minos—"

Like a man in a spell, Minos heard her words. Closer to him she swayed. He felt the softness of her body against his breast. From the folds of her cloak her white arms crept up about his neck and drew his face to hers. Their cheeks touched. Flame answered flame. With a deep-voiced cry, "*Memene!*" he caught her to him and crushed her lips against his own.

For a time they stood, locked fast in each other's arms. Then Minos lifted his face to the scintillant stars in the pale Antarctic sky. "If somewhere above there dwelleth a power which doth guide the destinies of men! Minos giveth thanks," he called, exulting—"thanks for the will within him which hath stood firm to wrest from dark days of strife and death one moment such as this!"

He shook his fist toward the south. "Come, thou wild spirit of the wastes," he cried, "o'erwhelm the valley of Sardanes with thy snows and thy tempests! Minos thou canst not daunt. Thou mayest kill, but thou canst not take away that which this day hath given!"

Again he bent above the girl, and saw her face all rosy and dimpled, where before it had been cold and indifferent. Mockery dwelt there no longer. The lights of love shone so strongly as to shake his stout heart.

Had he won her but to lose her?

"Ah, Memene, Memene, loved one," he whispered, "love like ours was never doomed to die here in the snows. There must—there shall be some way to cheat death—"

From within the cave the baying of Pallas and her brood interrupted him. He started, his every nerve athrill with a new thought.

"There *is* a way!" he cried. "The beasts of the stranger! Whither passed Polaris and Kalin and the Rose maid, to that faraway land they named America, there shall we fare, also—there where is light and warmth for love. When the long night hath passed, my princess, then shall we journey northward!"

Memene, nestling close to him, replied, "Would that it might be so, O king of mine. Would that time might give us of its mercy and its years. Then would Memene show thee how a Sardanian girl can love. But if so much be not granted to us, and cold death cometh, Memene shall be well content to die with thee."

He led her gently through the passage, and with infinite tenderness lifted her over the rock and into the cavern. When they were come thither, Minos suddenly smacked his thigh, and a short and foolish laugh burst from him. He looked at her, abashed.

"What is it that maketh thee to laugh thus and look so strangely?" asked the girl.

"Why, lady," he said, shamefacedly, "it did strike upon my mind that every priest in Sardanes hath gone, and there is none left to wed us."

A flood of burning color made the face of Memene more lovely still. She covered her hot cheeks with her hands. When she looked up again, she met the troubled gaze of the king with a brave smile.

"Thou knowest the words of the ancient ceremony, Minos, dost thou not?" she asked him.

"Aye, by rote."

"Yonder is wine, and here be lights. Let us say it, each to the other. I think that those who watch from above, seeing how it is with us, shall not greatly blame."

Minos stretched a rug on the rock floor and fetched a gleaming ilium flagon, which he set on one of the chests. Then lover and maid knelt before one of the flaring torches with joined hands. Sentence by sentence, they repeated the responses of the quaint old Sardanian marriage rite, through to the "Be thou mine and I thine until our call cometh." They touched the wine with their lips, then rose and passed their hands with fingers locked above the flame of the torch.

"My bride!" Minos whispered, and gathered the girl in his arms. The great gray dogs looked on with curious eyes. So were Minos and Memene wed.

Within a week after the death march of the Sardanian nation, the fires that had lingered in the crater of the Gateway to the Future had passed away, and that hill was cold and still as any in the ring of the valley. On its slopes the grass and herbage withered, and the snows fell. For a few days the steeps swarmed with goats, the hardy animals outliving the last of the ponies; but they, too, soon died of the cold and starvation.

The big bonfires that the people had built around their last camp had long since burned out to ashes. The mantle of darkness that fell over the valley was broken only by the blaze on the hill of Latmos, which Minos tended, laboring mightily, and hewing therefor vast quantities of wood from the stark hymanan forests.

The task of bringing the wood up the mountainside through the snow overtaxed even his great strength, if he would have enough to keep his fire big and bright. Leaving three of the younger dogs with the Princess Memene, he took Pallas and the other three, one day, and set off for the storehouse at the outer foot-hills of the north pass to fetch his sledge.

On his way to the pass, he stopped at the Gateway. He climbed the rugged terraces, passed the arch and the spiral pathway, groping his way in the darkness, and once more, and for the last time, stood within the temple of his father's god.

The night was clear, and the polar stars shone brightly down. Some portion of their radiance penetrated through the open summit of the mountain, making faint twilight within it. Fierce gusts of wind shrieked and eddied through the giant cone, tossing with them swirls of drifting snow. The gale clutched at the cloak of the king. The white snow-wraiths leaped and danced. In the wild moaning of the wind, it were easy to fancy that the ghosts of the dead Sardanians were wailing above the ruins of their temple. In that place of gloom Minos tarried but a little while, then went his way.

Returning with his sledge some two hours later, the king found that a new and powerful life had entered the valley. As he passed across the snow-fields where once had been the marshes, he heard a far-away and hideous howling break forth from the cliffs of the Gateway. It was answered by the snarling of his dog-pack. The four as one turned in their traces and strained toward the hill, mouthing their challenge loud. From the Latmos hill echoed the baying of their three fellows.

Well did Minos, the hunter, know the meaning of the outcry above him. Holding back his dogs sternly, he peered up the towering mass of the mountain. Outlined against the dark body of a cliff, he saw, or thought he saw, two monstrous white forms roaring and striking. Cracking his long lash above the backs of his unwilling beasts, he hurried to Latmos.

With the far-flaming menace of the fiery hills removed, the monarchs of the wilderness, the polar bears, had come to Sardanes, where they never had dared to penetrate before. They had crept over the mountain rim, and were quarreling among themselves as they tore at the carcasses of the dead goats on the sides of the Gateway. How long would it be ere they came up against Latmos? And should they beset his path when he ventured on his journey northward? thought the king with sudden fear. What then? He carried no weapons that would slay from afar, as did the son of the snows who had gone before him.

From that day on Minos went no more afield. With the aid of the dogs and the sledge, he hauled huge store of wood and piled it against the cliffs at either side of the cave entrance. Laborious as was the work, he carried large quantities of the fuel to the interior of the cavern and stacked it against the walls.

Weeks grew into months. Darkness and starlight alternated, grew at length into gray twilight, as the slow sun journeyed farther and farther southward. Still Minos and his princess dwelt in their cavern and kept life strong within them. With wood and skins and cloths, of which there was an almost inexhaustible store in the cave, the king constructed a sort of room, by walling off a gallery that branched into the cliff from one side of the main cavity and adjoining the entrance. That made much smaller the space he must heat and light. He abandoned the practise of keeping a fire on the plateau, kindling it there only when he made an excursion after more wood. In that way he cut down his labor much.

For food, they drew on the vast granary bins that lined the sides of the cavern, supplemented with dried fruits and honey. In one of the galleries of the cave was a stock of smoked meats, and that Minos reserved for the dogs, fearing that a diet of bread alone might cause the animals to sicken.

His labor and forethought, his splendid struggle against odds, did not avert the lash of calamity. Unlooked for, it dealt him a stroke that ended all his hopes.

He had brought a sledge load of wood up the hillside one day, and had loosed the dogs from their harness and driven them through the passage. Ahead of him, the lithe beasts scrambled over the rock into the cavern. As active as they, he put a hand to the rock and leaped. A loop of the harness he bore caught on ax projection on the boulder and threw him. He fell heavily on his face. His ax of ilium slipped from his belt and fell beneath him, its keen-edged blade uppermost. His head struck on it, and it bit deep into his right temple.

With his senses swaying, Minos dragged himself to his feet. He reeled along the passage to the curtained entrance to his home. Nearly spent, and with the bright blood coursing down his neck, he staggered straight through the fire and fell across his couch. He heard the cry of Memene, his loved one, but it sounded faint and far. He felt her arms close around him, and then darkness let fall its heavy curtain over his mind.

Days passed while he lay in a stupor, and strange dream dramas played themselves out around his pillow. Again he stood in the narrow pass, and stout Sardanians went down before his good sword. Again he stood on Latmos's side and saw the stricken people march boldly to their doom, only that time the one most loved of all went with them, and he was chained and could not follow.

Vainly he called out to her, "Memene! Memene!"

With that dear name upon his lips, the king awoke. He found her head pillowed close to his own. Her arms were around his neck. She was weeping softly and gazing into his face, her black eyes filled with sorrow and terror. Around the couch he heard the dogs whining and growling. It was very cold, and only one faint ray of light struggled through a cleft in the rock above the passage that went into the little room.

Minos strove to raise himself on his elbow, but found himself too weak. "What hath befallen," he muttered, "and why is it so cold and dark?"

"Oh, Minos, Minos," wailed the girl, "our end is come. Our fire—'tis gone. Worn out with tending thee, for thou hast lain sick these many days, I did give way and sleep—for but a little hour, I thought—and when I woke our

fire was gone. Not one little spark was left. Ah, Minos, thou diest, and I myself have slain thee, my love, my love."

With a mighty effort he raised an arm and set it about her. "Nay, fret not for that which thou couldst not prevent," he whispered. "Minos is content to die. It was to be. The end cometh but a little sooner, this way."

A burst of howling from without interrupted him and goaded the dogs to frenzy.

Memene shuddered. "The great white bears are there," she whispered. "They have howled for hours. Soon will they enter and rend us. I have tied the dogs fast so that they might not rush out and fight and be slain— *Ah—see!*"

Horror struck, she pointed to the passage. Overcoming by degrees his fear, of an unseen trap, one of the monsters had penetrated the pass and was clawing at the rock. The way was narrow, but, by dint of much writhing and squeezing, the bear reared his ponderous bulk over the boulder. In the dusk of the passageway his shaggy head and colossal shoulders shone white. His cruel jaws slavered as he craned his head around the turn in the wall, swaying it slowly from side to side, as his blazing merciless eyes sought out his prey.

At that sight the Princess Memene turned from fear to rage. Like a tigress with young, she leaped from the couch, caught a spear from the wall, and dashed into the passage.

"Thou shalt not!" she shrieked, scarce knowing what she said. "Thou shalt not enter! My king and I shall die in peace, and not be torn by thee!"

As she screamed she struck furiously at the bear's head with the ilium spear, and gashed him deeply. Wedged where he could go neither backward nor forward without great effort, the huge animal was hard put to it to defend himself from the attack of the infuriated woman. Dauntlessly she faced him, thrusting with the spear.

Minos, on his couch, strove with all his will and strength to rise up and go to her aid, but so weak was he that all his struggling did not lift his shoulders from his pillow.

In the narrow confines of the cave, the howling of the bear and the snarling of the seven dogs, gone mad at sight of their enemy and with balked lust for fighting, made the din of an inferno. The gray snow runners twisted and tore at their leashes, and leaped and leaped again, only to fall back on the rock floor, as their ropes held.

Pallas alone used method. Finding her struggles for freedom in vain, she turned on the stout rope, and rent it with her teeth. Tearing at it furiously, she weakened it. At last it gave way, and she bounded past the princess and leaped straight in the monster's face.

Slashed and bleeding, with the sight of one eye nearly gone, the bear was fully aroused. As the dog leaped, one powerful white paw swung, armed with its spread of crescent claws. It caught Pallas in mid-air, hurled her against the side of the passage, and she fell, her lifeblood spurting from a jagged wound in her neck. Another stroke dashed the spear from the hand of Memene.

Gathering his hind legs under him against the rock, the bear thrust himself forward into the cave!

CHAPTER VI

BACK TO LIFE AND LIGHT

Screaming in a desperate frenzy that cast aside all fear, the Princess Memene sprang back along the passage and caught up another spear to replace that which the stroke of the bear had spun from her grasp. In her veins surged up the blood that had faced death on many a hard-fought battlefield in the years when the world was young, and counted no odds. Pale to the lips, her eyes ablaze, she fronted her towering antagonist. For the bear was over the rock now, reared on his hinder legs, and advancing to make an end.

At her feet writhed the dying dog, above her swung the crescent talons; the roaring, slavering jaws were opening wide to rend and tear her tender flesh.

Came a flash of fire from the passage, a crashing report that echoed and vibrated through the rocky corridor. The bear stiffened in every limb and line. A shudder ran through his immense bulk. He turned half around and, with one unearthly howl, collapsed across the floor of the passage, his life gushing from him in a crimson torrent that jetted from under his shoulder.

As though in the grip of a dream, the girl saw the beast go down. She heard the fiendish clamor of the ravening pack behind her, sounding faint and from a distance. Then with a shout a great man clothed in white furs strode into the passage. His cap had fallen from his head, and long golden hair fell about his shoulders. In his hand he carried a smoking rifle.

For a moment he stood out to the girl's sight, clear cut as a living cameo. The darkness fell upon her. Vainly she strove to command her dizzying senses. Her knees gave way. With a little sigh, she pitched forward, falling across the carcass of the bear, which still was moving feebly in its death agony.

Polaris leaped over the body of his fallen foe and stood, peering about him with quick glances. As his eyes became accustomed to the half light in the cavern, he saw the princess lying across the dying monster, her long black hair disheveled and mingled with the snowy fur of the brute. He stooped and caught up the girl and laid her gently to one side, where the beast in the throes of dissolution might not do her harm.

Looking beyond her, he saw the small room hung with skins, saw the six gray dogs crouched in leash, every burning eye turned on him, and, at the farther side of the room, saw the long, broad form of a man lying loose flung across a low pallet, his head hanging over its side. All that he saw, and then from the dusk along the wall of the passage a gaunt, gray form reared up in his path, and he forgot all else.

"Pallas!" he cried. "Pallas! Are you come back from the dead?"

Taking a stiff step forward, the dog gathered all the strength in her weakening frame and raised herself on her hind legs. She set her forepaws against the breast of the master loved so well and, whining, strove to look into his face. Her eyes were glazing, and the blood was spurting fast from a ghastly wound in her neck.

"No, my Pallas, you are no ghost—but soon will be," Polaris said with breaking voice. "I find you, and I lose you." He steadied the dog with his strong hands and laid her cold muzzle against his cheek.

With each gasping breath she tried to bark her joy, but she was too weak. A low howl burst from her lungs that carried with it a world of glad greeting, affection, and farewell. She shuddered, her head drooped, and her limbs relaxed.

"Good-by, Pallas," whispered the master. He lowered the limp body to the floor and stepped forward, wet-eyed, to explore the other wonders of the cave. First he carried the unconscious girl into the room and laid her on one of the large chests, drawing a blanket over her. Crouching along the wall, where they were tied fast to a beam, the six children of Pallas watched his every motion, their hackles erect, their teeth bared. He ran his eyes approvingly over their powerful forms, and noted with a smile the leathern harness that hung on the beam.

"You serve a master who has trained you well," he muttered. "'Soon you and I shall be fast friends.'"

Approaching the pallet, Polaris took the man who lay there by the shoulders and turned him over, placing his head back on its pillow. He started with surprise when, despite the emaciation of sickness and a ten days' growth of beard, he recognized the well-remembered features of the Sardanian king.

"You, too, Minos?" he exclaimed. "Truly, the ways of fate are strange."

A touch of the hand told him that the heart of the king still beat. He glanced around the room. The fireplace,

with its dead ashes, told its story. For the first time he realized, the cold of the place.

"A wound, sickness, the loss of fire, and no means to make one, then the beast. I find you in evil case, indeed, Minos the king," he said.

He hurried to the fireplace and piled wood upon the hearth. With his keen knife he hacked splinters and set them to the wood. Producing a box of matches from the breast of his shirt, he struck them and fired the pile in many places. Going back to the king, he exerted his great strength, and dragged the couch across the rocky floor to the side of the fireplace. He spread a rug on the floor and laid the girl on it. She showed no sign as yet of returning consciousness.

While he was at work, he heard the voice of Zenas Wright calling him insistently from the hill slopes outside the cave, where he had left him to mind the dog team.

Polaris hastened out, and met the old man in the passage.

"I was getting worried," the scientist said. "I've unhitched those wicked brutes of yours and given them something to chew on. They'd have taken a chance at me if I hadn't, I guess. What's in there?"

In a few words Polaris told him what he had found, the old geologist tugging at his white beard and punctuating the tale with many an exclamation of surprise.

"Now haste you within, old man, with that flask of yours," said Polaris, "and see if the man may be saved. The girl, I think, is sound and well—she has only fainted—but Minos the king has been sorely wounded, and lies so ill that his bones almost show through his flesh."

Zenas Wright ran to the sledge and fetched a small medicine case and a leather-covered flask of brandy. Polaris helped him to scramble over the rock to the inner corridor.

"Ware the dogs," the young man cautioned. "Keep well away from them, or they will have the clothes from off your back. There are some things to be done out here, and then I will join you."

The scientist hastened along the passage. By the leaping firelight he surveyed the strangest room that ever he had seen in all his threescore and odd years. The huge carved chests, the cloths and rugs of strange materials, the quaint utensils, the weapons of iridescent ilium, lighted the fires of enthusiasm in his eyes.

"Marvelous!" he said. Well as he would have liked to stop at once, and handle and study those curiosities, he hurried on, giving a wide berth to the snarling brutes, which gave him no friendly greeting. He reached the side of the couch and bent above the still form of the king.

With expert fingers, the old man felt the wrists of Minos. "Um-m, he's not so bad," he muttered. He unbound the bandage from the king's head and inspected the wound in the sick man's temple. It had been a deep gash and a wide, but it was nearly healed. Zenas Wright found a small flagon and water, in which he mixed a draft of the fiery brandy. Supporting the king's head on his arm, Wright forced his lips and teeth apart and poured the strong spirit down Minos's throat.

The sick man coughed weakly, but swallowed the liquor. Almost immediately a line of color crept across his white face. He turned on the old man's arm, his head wavered from side to side; then he settled himself, and his deep, regular breathing indicated that he had passed from swooning into sleep.

From the king the geologist passed to the girl. He lifted the long, dark tresses from her face. "A beauty, or would be if she was washed," he commented. For Memene's cheeks were stained with tears, and grime from the floor where she had fallen, and smeared with blood that had jetted from the polar bear.

Polaris's fire was blazing hotly, and the room was warm. Wright loosened the girl's dress at the neck. He poured a few drops of the brandy into her mouth. Finding a small cloth, he dipped it in water, and laved her face and hands. Fear, rage, and despair had combined strongly in the shock which brought about her faint, and she did not respond at once. When he saw that her breathing was becoming easier, the old man left her, and set about redressing the wound

on the head of the sick man.

He was busy with scissors, bandages, and ointment, when he heard a gasping cry behind him.

Over him stood Memene. Far above her head, in the grip of both hands, she swung the flashing ilium sword of Minos'. Zenas Wright let fall his bandages and shrank, startled fully as much by the rage of suspicion and anger in the girl's face as by the menace of the glittering blade.

"Drop it, foolish girl! Drop it!" he shouted hastily, recovering himself somewhat. "Can't you see that I'm only mending your man's broken head?" He held out the bandages and pointed to the wound in Minos's temple and the basin and balm.

His words meant nothing to the Sardanian princess, but she comprehended the gestures. The suspicion left her dark eyes. Slowly she lowered the sword. With a little cry she let it fall on the floor. In another instant she was curled at the head of the king's couch, and her quick, soft fingers were aiding the old man laving the wound, and picking up for him, in turn, each article that he required, almost before he indicated it.

Her eyes followed every minute step of the operations. She watched jealously every fleeting shade of expression in the old man's face. Several times she overwhelmed him with a torrent of words that were "Greek" indeed to him. He could only spread his hands out helplessly and shake his head in answer.

Clutching at his arm when the bandage was made fast, she pointed to the sleeping man. Zenas Wright replied to the concern and the question in her face by placing his finger first over the heart of Minos and then on the wound, and smiling, and nodding.

Wild joy shone in the eyes of Memene. She made as if to kneel at Zenas Wright's feet, then remembered that she was a princess. She raised her arm in the Sardinian salute. Then the strange girl threw herself into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and gave way to her woman's need for tears.

On the hill slope Polaris busied himself making a camp for his huskies, for, said he, "There would be a rare uproar, without end, did I take them in there where the gray brood of my Pallas are."

He stamped a circle in the snow, and made a fire of hymanan wood from Minos's store of firewood. He found Minos's sledge and set it against the cliff, with wooden blocks for braces. He rolled a big log into place in front of it, screwed a number of rings which he carried for the purpose into its side, and tethered the huskies, where they might not come at the stores on the other sledge. Some loose robes cast into the hollow behind the log sufficed, and the tired brutes crawled onto them thankfully and curled up for a well-earned rest.

So tired were they that they bolted without fighting for the food he threw to them—and it is a tired husky, indeed, that will not try to rob his neighbors of his rations.

Presently the step of the son of the snows sounded in the passage to the cave room. The Princess Memene sprang up and faced him.

One searching look she gave him, poignant with inquiry. With hands extended as though to ward back a danger, she stepped in front of Minos's couch.

"Ah, well I know thee!" she exclaimed. "Thou art that stranger from the North come again to Sardanes. Thou wert his enemy. Thou wouldst not harm him now? Thou canst not have the heart! See, he hath suffered much and lieth low—"

"Nay, nay, save thy fears, lady," Polaris answered in the ancient tongue. "Polaris fighteth not with sick men, and would be friend to Minos and to thee. From many a hundred leagues to the north hath he come hither to save whom he might from the doom which this man's knowledge told would fall on thy land." He pointed to Zenas Wright.

"My mind recalleth thee not, lady," he continued. "Of what house art thou, and how named?"

"Memene, daughter of the Lord Karnoon, am I," replied the girl proudly; and still more proudly, "I am the bride of Minos, King of Sardanes."

"And, lady, art thou and the king the last to live in all the valley?" asked the son of the snows eagerly. "I can see sign of none others."

"We be the only Sardanians who have not passed the Gateway," the girl replied, "save Kalin the priest, alone, who fared north with thee and the Rose maid."

"Then art thou indeed the last," Polaris said, "for Kalin died out yonder in the snows, and these hands did bury him."

"Now, lady, take the rest, thine eyes do tell me thou needest so much. All shall be well with thee, and thy husband lieth safe in the care of a skilled man. An thou gainsayest me not, I will feed thy gray beasts yonder, and clear thy doors of the carcass of the snow-wanderer there. When thou are refreshed again, we fain would hear from thee how it went with you, how Sardanes fell, and how it is that we found thee so."

With the ax of Minos, Polaris hacked apart the carcass of the huge bear and hung it in sections along the outer corridor, reserving it for food for the beasts. Indeed, the six dogs of Minos were almost friendly with him after they had taken a meal at his hands, receiving the fresh meat ravenously after a long diet of smoked flesh.

Memene slept, but with much tossing and crying out, as in her dreams she reviewed the troubled hours that preceded slumber. Minos lay quiet for many hours, while old Zenas Wright watched and Polaris busied himself about the fires and explored the recesses of the cavern. When at length the king awoke, the first thing he saw with conscious eyes was the face of the son of the snows bent over him. Polaris saw the leaping question in the sick man's eyes, and answered it. "I come in peace, and as a friend to thee, O Minos, an thou wilt have it so," he said. "See, thy princess slumbers yonder, safe and well. Thou shalt soon be strong, and then will be time for the telling of strange tales between us. Then shall we fare hence out of the wilderness on the northern road."

Minos's glance strayed from him to where Memene lay asleep, her dark hair fallen across her cheek. The face of the king grew very wistful.

"I understand it not," he said, his voice hardly above a breath. "The end of all had come, and now I find thee here—and fire and light. Almost too weak am I to think. Thou and I did fight—"

"Vex not thy mind at present with thinking, O Minos," Polaris interrupted. "All is well, and shall be. Here now is my friend, Zenas Wright, with that for thee that shall put new life into thee. Eat and rest."

With curious interest the king studied the kindly face of the scientist as he came to the couch with a flagon of steaming broth, brewed of grains and flesh, laced well with wine. So weak was Minos that the old man must raise his head from the pillow while he drank. When he had finished, the sick man lay looking at the beloved face across from him, and so passed again into sleep.

Great vitality and a constitution kept hardy by years of vigorous living responded quickly to the care he received, and within less than a week Minos was on his feet again, still pale, but mending rapidly.

When he was strong enough to talk, he learned the purpose of the visit of Polaris and Wright, and he struck hands of friendship with both of them. His great heart bore no enmity toward Polaris, who told him all of the story of Kard the Smith, and other events which preceded his troublous departure from Sardanes, somewhat of, which had been hidden from Minos.

"Though thou hast slain two of my blood and more of my people, I hold thee to no wrong for it," he said, and added simply, "Truly, had I been so circumstanced, I should have done no less." He glanced tenderly at Memene, who sat at his knee, and touched her dark hair with his hand. "I, too, have fought and slain for my lady."

Then the adventurers heard from the lips of the king of the passing of the fires from Sardanes, the madness of

Analos, the battles and the death march of the nation through the Gateway. Polaris translated the telling of the tale to Zenas Wright, who hung upon each word with breathless interest.

Some days later, when the king had become strong enough to be about the cave and to keep the fire aglow, Polaris and Zenas Wright took torches and journeyed across the white valley to the Gateway hill, and paid a visit to the ancient temple of death on the ledge of the mighty crater. There was a spot from which the old scientist scarce could tear himself, even after he had spent hours in examination, and the torches were nearly exhausted.

On the wall in one of the temple chambers they found hanging a small cross, with its ends curiously turned. It was not of the ilium of Sardanes, but of gold.

"Priceless!" said Zenas Wright in an awed whisper. "That ornament came here from the Aegean Sea long before Christ was born in Judea."

Although it seemed almost an act of sacrilege to disturb it, the old man plucked it from its place and carried it away with him.

Three more weeks passed, and Minos the king apparently was as whole and well as on that day when he fell over the guardian rock. Each day saw added preparations for their journey back to the *Minnetonka*. From the stores in the cavern Polaris replenished his sledge supplies, and packed the load for the sled of Minos. From boughs of the tough hymanan wood the son of the snows fashioned the frames of snowshoes and wove their nets of sinew of the bear. For both Minos and Memene he made them, and there was much sport when they both fared forth in the snow to try them. After much floundering and not a little lameness, both of the Sardanians mastered this new method of locomotion.

Many questions Minos and his princess asked about the land to which they were going, and its people and customs. To them, who had known only the mountain-ringed valley and the impenetrable wilderness, it was well-nigh incomprehensible that a land could be where the sun shone alternately with the blackness of night, day by day, the whole year around. The immensity of the world, as pictured to them by Polaris and the geologist, staggered them.

"And the ladies in thy great, far world, are they most fair," Memene asked—"fairer than those of poor Sardanes?"

Polaris gazed on the regal beauty of the girl, and answered dryly, "Few, indeed," and bethought himself that her question boded ill for the king, should he ever look too long on other charms.

"But in this land of thine, how will it fare with me," questioned Minos, "where possessions are valued thus and so, as thou tellest me, and where men barter of their labor and their wit for thy medium of exchange thou namest 'money'? Say, what shall be open to one like Minos, who hath naught, and who is but little skilled in aught?"

They were seated about the fireplace in the cavern room. Polaris met the perplexed look of the king with a smile.

"If I guess aright, that problem shall not afflict thee, O Minos," he answered. "Thou has that, I believe, which will find an eager market, and having which, thou shalt want for nothing all thy days."

"How mean you?" asked Minos.

Polaris pointed to an ilium bangle on the arm of Memene. It was set with dull red stones, similar to those in a necklace that once had been the gift of Kalin to the son of the snows.

"He that wast true friend to me aforetime," he replied, "did tell me that in Sardanes were many more stones such as those. On an occasion when I was sore in need of aid three small gems, not half the size of those in that bracelet, did get me friends and servants, and carry me whither I would go. Rubies, they call them in the world. Greatly are

they prized. I judge the price in money of that one ornament thy princess weareth would maintain her and thee in comfort all your years. Add a few more, and thou shouldst be rich, indeed."

Minos rose quickly from his seat. "An that be truth, then we shall all be rich," he answered, "for here in the storehouse of my fathers are many such."

He dragged out from its place against the rock wall a stout chest and threw back the lid. Stretching a rug before it, he strewed it with every variety of ornament known to the ladies of Sardanes. Rings, armlets, necklaces, slender crowns to be worn on the hair, girdles, brooches, and even anklets, he added to the profusion of the glittering heap.

Zenas Wright gasped, his wonder and pleasure as a savant fully aroused by that pouring forth from the treasure-chest of antiquity. The toys were of exquisite workmanship. What would not a museum give for even one of them to grace its showcases?

"Many a Sardanian princess hath found delight in these," said Minos, as he emptied the last of the contents of the chest onto the rug. "Scarcely a child in all the valley that did not possess some ornament set with the red stones that were dug from the hillsides. These things, you say, may be exchanged for wealth?"

"That they may," Polaris said. "Thou hast there enough to buy for thee a space of land as large as this valley of Sardanes and place in it almost what thou wilt." In English, he asked of Zenas Wright, "What say you, old man, of the worth of the gems?"

The explorer was on his knees, examining these new wonders. He ran his eyes appraisingly over the heap. "I am not an expert lapidary," he replied; "but if these are anywhere near the quality of those you brought to America—and they seem to be even better—their value will run into millions of dollars."

"We shall share them," said Minos the king, nor would he listen to protests from either of the men. "Ye did come hither at the risk of your lives, and brought life to us," he said. "It is but a little thing that Minos can do in return. These baubles, these red rubies from the hills that Sardanians call *thalmi*, if they will add to your comfort in your world, are all too little. It is the will of Minos that the division of them shall be equal—if, indeed, there are not too many of them to carry hence."

He stood stubbornly to that decision, and the end was that they took the greater part of the stones from their settings and packed them in small sacks. Even then, so many there were of them that they threw out any that did not give promise of being first-class gems. They were packed securely away then on the sledge of Minos.

By their reckoning, little more than four weeks from the day on which they entered Sardanes, Polaris and Zenas Wright bade farewell to the cave on the Latmos hill, and with them went the two so strangely saved from the still white death that had settled on the ancient valley.

They stood on the lip of the north pass to take their last look. The Antarctic sun shone strongly on the snow reaches. Only in their minds' eyes could the travelers recall the wonders of the lost kingdom. Except for their own tracks in the snow on the hillside, there was naught to tell that man had ever set foot in the valley.

Minos raised his hand in the Sardanian salute.

"Farewell, land of my fathers," he said aloud. "Minos leaveth thee without regret for a larger life than thou couldst hold. All the bitterness of parting was his when his people passed from him. He feeleth none now."

They pressed on into the notch of the pass, Polaris keeping well ahead with his team of huskies lest there should be fighting of dogs, for there was no love and much hatred between the brood of Pallas and the Alaskan brutes.

Halfway down the north side of the pass, while they were proceeding slowly, one of the huskies balked for an instant to burrow in the snow. He dug up a brown object, which Polaris snatched from him. Immediately he turned to Zenas Wright.

"How can this be, old man?" he said. "This is none of ours, and who else can have passed this way?" He held out the thing which the dog had found. It was a man's shoe, a stout hunting shoe, well spiked at the sole for snow traveling. It was torn as though by sharp teeth, and its thongs were gone.

While Polaris and Wright examined the shoe in wonder, the three leading huskies, sniffing eagerly, suddenly plunged into the drift to the right of the pass, turning the rest of the team with them.

"There is worse than a shoe there!" cried Zenas Wright. "Stop them!"

By main strength, Polaris tore the snarling brutes out of the bank and whipped them into the path. They dragged with them a heavy coat, the torn fragments of other garments, and a number of human bones, clean of flesh.

Zenas Wright viewed the relics with a shudder. "Some one has perished here in the snow, and the bears have eaten him," he said.

Polaris, exploring farther in the hole the dogs had dug, straightened up suddenly. "Some one has been done to death here," he said sternly. He held in his hand a ghastly skull. In it there were two holes, one at the base, the other in the forehead—the smooth, round holes that only a bullet leaves!

Further examination of the snow disclosed other bones and fragments of clothing. There was nothing in the pockets of the coat or about the scene of the tragedy to indicate who it was that had met his death there, or whence he had come. He had died, the bears had devoured his remains, leaving naught but his bones and a mystery, which the shows had shrouded from all but the keen nosed dogs.

From the path above them Minos drove his team down and halted it close behind. He could not leave his dogs, and so Memene came on to find out the cause of the delay. Polaris hastily threw snow over his grim find so that the princess might not see it, and went back with her to tell the Sardanian. The king could make no more of the affair than could he.

Polaris scraped away the snow and ice from the base of the pass-cliff, where a fissure ran up the rock, and there he laid the bones of the stranger, placing them well within the crevice, and covering them with the coat. He rolled a boulder to the mouth of the fissure and jammed it fast with all his strength.

"It is all that we can do," he said. "Whoever he was, or where from, he sleeps, and cannot answer the least of our questions."

"Who can have been here since we came?" Zenas Wright asked, as they once more went on down the pass.

"Not sure am I that he was not already here before we passed this way," said Polaris.

"But wouldn't the dogs have found him on the way in, in that case?" persisted Wright.

"It was hereabouts that we did meet the bear when we entered Sardanes," replied Polaris. "At that time the dogs had noses only for the scent of their enemy, and might have passed a hundred corpses and given no sign. That poor fellow back yonder might have lain in his snow bed all unsuspected. He might have been there for months. The snow and the cold would have kept the bones as we found them. How it came about that a man from the outer world did penetrate the wilderness to Sardanes, and then was slain in her very portals, passes my comprehension."

As the two teams passed swiftly along the reaches of the Hunters' Road, Zenas Wright noticed that his younger companion, running with the sledge, hesitated often, and cast many a keen glance along the path they followed. Once or twice, Polaris halted the animals entirely, while he knelt in the snow to scrutinize intently manifestations which he seemed to find there, but which were beyond the ken of the scientist. His face grew thoughtful, and there was a shadow in his amber eyes.

"What is it, son?" queried Wright at length, when the actions of Polaris had aroused a curiosity which the younger man did not volunteer to satisfy.

"I know not yet," Polaris answered; "and would not say the thing I think until I am wholly sure."

"Has it something to do with the corpse we found back there?"

"Aye, much perhaps," and the son of the snows relapsed into a moody silence that was strange to him.

At their first camping spot, well out near the end of the Hunters' Road, Polaris left Minos standing his turn as sentinel, and, while the old man and the girl slept, he went forward along the way alone. He was absent for more than two hours. He returned with overcast countenance, and without a word as to his explorations, crawled into his sleeping bag. For a long time he lay staring out across the surrounding snows before he closed his eyes for a few hours of slumber. When he awoke, Zenas Wright was on watch beside him.

"Well, did you find anything to give you a clue?" asked the geologist.

"I found the trail of a sledge and dogs on ahead of us," Polaris replied; "and know not what they may mean."

The old man regarded him sharply. "I hardly need to ask you if they were the tracks we made coming in?" he said.

"It was to be sure that they were not that I went on to see," said Polaris. "If it had not snowed since we came through, some parts of the road are so sheltered that our tracks might not have been filled in by the drift. But what I have seen sets aside all doubt. *The tracks lead both ways!*"

"Then some one has been on our trail, or, at least, over the same path, and has gone north again."

Polaris nodded.

"From the ship?—That seems incomprehensible."

"That is to be told only when we reach the ship," answered Polaris; "that, and why a dead man lies in the north pass to Sardanes with a bullet hole through his head."

More enigmas waited along the road to the coast, but none as gruesome as the white bones of the unknown.

Turning to the west from the Hunters' Road, they skirted the great barrier range, and had made nearly half the distance to the end of their snow journeying when they came upon the spot where a camp had been made, and not many days before. The snow at the side of one of the hummocks was packed down where a man, or men, and dogs had slept. Search as they might, the adventurers could not find a trace to indicate who it was that traveled ahead of them.

Polaris hid from his companions as best he might a growing uneasiness, a suspicion that he resolved should go unsaid. He was only partially successful. The king and Memene noticed nothing, and were only passing curious; but Zenas Wright was oppressed by forebodings as dark as those of Janess, if not as definite.

When they were not more than four hours' journey from the coast, a biting blizzard of gale-driven sleet sprang up in their faces. The sun was storm-darkened, and the tempest blew with such violence that they could make but little headway against it. Finding a snug shelter in a hollow between two beetling crags, they decided to make camp and wait for the first fury of the storm to wear itself out.

Tossing and unable to sleep, Polaris formed a sudden resolve to rid himself of all uncertainty. He aroused Zenas Wright.

"It is in my mind to take the five freshest of the dogs and make a quick dash on to the ship," he said. "There I can get new beasts and come back. I will lighten the sledge to make the going quick. In this storm there will be no bears abroad to attack the camp, if there be any of the animals in this neighborhood. I shall not rest until I have seen the ship. Because of the illness of Minos, we have been over-long away, and my coming will set many minds at rest."

Zenas Wright nodded understandingly. He reached in his pocket for his long-since emptied flask and handed it over.

"You might fill this for me, if you will," he said with a smile. "This cold chills me to the very marrow of my bones. I'd give almost the weight of the flask in these red rubies of ours for one good nip of cognac."

Polaris removed a part of the load on the sledge, and routed the dogs from their sleeping-nest. He found it no light task to whip the beasts into the teeth of the storm, but they feared the cracking lash more than they did the biting of the wind, and, once under way, they made good time.

Driving snow had wiped away all trace of the double track which the unknown traveler had left; but he had left another trail—the trail of blood.

He was an hour upon his way when Polaris felt the pace of his dogs slacken. The man swung the long lash in the air, but held his hand. Boris, the leading husky, balked, slid on his haunches, and threw up his nose, to emit a long and doleful howl that sung against the shrilling of the tempest like the wail of a violin in a stormy overture.

They were passing one of the towering rock hummocks, and the dog plunged from the trail at its base, throwing his mates into confusion. With a chorus of howls, the entire pack struggled into the drift at the side of the hummock.

Knowing from their actions that something lay there that was worthy of investigation, Polaris waded into the drift ahead of the frantic animals. Under the snow he found an overturned sledge and, within a radius of a few yards, the carcasses of eight dogs, stiff and cold. A glance told the man that each of the animals had been shot through the head. The sledge was of the same pattern as the one he drove! The dogs were of the same breed!

* * *

High on a jutting prominence of ice-sheathed rock, overlooking the storm-driven, tossing waters of the furious Antarctic Ocean, stood a man clothed in skins of the white bear, with a circle of whining dogs at his feet. A terrific gale lashed the crests of the waves into spray that froze as it flew, and which fretted the face of the rock as with driven hail. So keen and bitter the blast that the hardy brutes cringed and whimpered under its sting, yet it tore by the man unheeded.

Towering among the shivering beasts, he stood like a man of marble. Every line of his handsome, high-featured face seemed graven. Only his tawny eyes smoldered. They were fixed on a small cairn, reared of rocks at the cliff brink. The tattered remnant of a small American flag whipped from a bit of ice-coated stick at the top of the cairn.

Beneath it a slab of wood had been made fast in the rock, and on its face a careful hand had carved a simple, fateful legend:

IN MEMORIAM

**ZENAS WRIGHT, A.C.S.
POLARIS JANESS, Adventurer
JAMES PARKERSON, seaman**

**Of the Sardanian Relief Expedition, Who
Perished in the Snows in November, 1923.**

**Erected by orders, Captain James Scoland,
Commanding Cruiser Minnetonka**

Moment succeeded moment. Still the man stood in the biting tempest, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the text of the simple memorial. He turned and faced the north, whence the gale was driven. Twice he raised his clenched fists above his head, as if presaging some fierce outburst of spirit; but no words came. His features relaxed into a stony smile.

"Of all puzzles, surely this is the strangest," he muttered. "Yet will I have its answer on that day when I find Captain Scoland again, so sure—so sure as my name is Polaris Janess!"

He glanced again at the swirling waters in the bay below him, where a stout cruiser should have ridden at anchor, but where no ship was; and then, with his dogs at his back, he strode away into the shrieking wilderness.

On the tenth day after the departure of Polaris Janess and Zenas Wright from the camp, the crashing and grinding of bergs beyond the mouth of the little harbor where the *Minnetonka* lay, warned Scoland and his men that the mighty southern drive of ice was on. The jam through which they had smashed their perilous way was broken. Soon the bay was filled with swirling drift that churned its surface water into a caldron of foam.

Close watch was kept lest one of the glittering monsters from the outer sea enter the bay and crowd the good ship against the rocks ashore. Once that danger was imminent, and the berg which thrust its menacing bulk into the neck of the bay was shattered by the *Minnetonka's* guns.

When the passing of three weeks had brought no sign of the two men who had penetrated into the white Antarctic fastnesses to carry the message of salvation from the outer world to Sardanes, speculation grew into anxiety among the members of the expedition left behind with the ship. Several of the hardier members of the expedition, who were innured to life in the cold places of the earth, broke their forced inactivity by short trips inland with the sledges and dogs, in the hopes of meeting the returning adventurers. Not even a trail was left to follow. The drifting snows had obliterated every trace of travel.

Most restless of all the company was the lean, dark captain, and day by day that restlessness grew. Spurred on by his unquiet spirit, he at length turned the command of the ship over to Lieutenant Everson, and announced that he was determined to make a dash inland and ascertain the fate of the two men who had gone before. He took a well-stocked sledge, and prepared to penetrate all the way to Sardanes, providing he could find it. With him went one sailor, that same James Parkerson whom Polaris had snatched from the icy waters of Ross Sea when the *Minnetonka* made her first drive into the blasted channel of the great jam.

Cool, confident, and daring, Scoland had no fears in making his sortie into the wilderness. He was equipped with a map drawn from memory by Polaris, and had little doubt but that he could find the Sardanian valley. He had a premonition that was more than half a conviction that, having found the valley, he should find no living man in it.

When he had seen the fury of the fires that had burst forth on the shores of Ross Sea, and had considered the distance which those fires must have traveled, he had lost faith in the ultimate success of the relief expedition. The more he had thought of it, the more was he convinced that the nation they sought to save had been engulfed in the snows of the Antarctic and had perished utterly.

Reason further told him that some serious misadventure must have befallen Wright and Janess; else why had they not returned to the ship long before?

Scoland and the sailor pushed inland as nearly on a straight course from the harbor as the conformation of the ground over which they traveled would allow. The captain kept a keen eye on the peaks of the barrier range, comparing them often with the map of Polaris. When he came at length to the appearance of a trail extending to the south at a right angle to the path he followed, Scoland had the aid of the bright sun to determine that it was the Hunters' Road. With his glasses he could see dimly in the southern distance the shimmering heights of the hills that ringed Sardanes.

Coming to the foothills, and finding in the snowdrifts the storehouse of the Sardanian hunters, where Minos and his men were accustomed to leave their sledges, Scoland and Parkerson knew that they had found the place they sought.

"No fire. Not a sign of smoke or fire," said Scoland, surveying the towering rim of the mountain range above them. "I'm afraid our men found nothing living here, if they found their way here at all."

"If they got here, where can they be?" Parkerson said. "There'd be nothing to keep them here this long, unless they met a mishap of some sort."

"Well, we shall soon see," Scoland replied. "Here appears to be a cut through the hills."

They guided the dogs up through the north pass. In another half an hour they stood in the notch, and had their first view of Sardanes—green Sardanes no longer, but aglitter down all its length with cold, cruel silver and glass.

As he gazed down that long and silent vista, the heart of Scoland leaped furiously, and his brain was overwhelmed with a flood of thoughts that shook even his iron control. Polaris was gone! The outlander who had thwarted so the ambitions of the captain had perished! The son of the wilderness who had turned Scoland's mighty discovery into a second place achievement, who had won from him the one woman in the world, who had broken through his fine web of painstaking precaution, and had triumphed at every turn of the wheel, no longer stood in his path!

Scoland's breast swelled. His eyes glittered. He, Captain James Scoland, should be the victor yet, in spite of all!

He would go back to America and wrest from the heart of the girl the fantom that now was his only rival. With that thought came the quick resolve that, did the man of the snows still live, he must look to himself.

Now Scoland knew the meaning of his uneasiness. Clearly into his mind trooped, naked and unashamed, the horde of black thoughts that for weeks had kept him company, but that had not dared to push themselves into the light of his brain where he might know them for what they were. He welcomed them now. This was why he had left the ship and come this journey through the snows. This was why he had brought one man only with him. All in an instant his mind was fixed, his course laid. That Polaris Janess had given him life, once, mattered not at all.

From right to left across the valley, and up and down its length, through the powerful lenses of his field glasses, the eyes of the captain swept. He returned them to their case with a snap.

"There's nothing to do but go back to the ship," he said, and it was by an effort that he curbed his voice to an ordinary tone. "Wright and Janess never reached here. They must have perished in the snows. Perhaps they fell into a crevasse. And here the great calamity that the geologist prophesied has come. All is dead."

But, kneeling in the snow with shaded eyes, Parkerson the sailor discovered what Scoland with his glasses had failed to find. He sprang up with a glad cry.

"They're here! See! See the smoke! There, on the side of the third hill!"

He was on his feet, and dancing in his excitement.

Scoland whipped the glasses out once more. He directed them against the snowy slopes of Mount Latmos. Under his thick, black mustache his lips writhed as he gazed. Yes, there was no doubt of it. From a dark patch against the whiteness of the drifts, a slender curling spiral of smoke was ascending.

Already Parkerson, his honest face aglow with delight, had started on down the slope, leading the team. His heart was filled with thanks that he should be able, in some measure, to repay the man who had saved his life.

With his eye Scoland measured the distance down the valley to that spiral of smoke. No, the sound would not carry. And if it did? Well, he was ready, and a desperate man. He unwound from his neck its thick woolen muffler and sprang down the slope behind the sailor. Drawing his heavy automatic from its holster and wrapping it in the scarf, he shot Parkerson through the head.

Scoland caught the man as he fell and threw the body on the sledge. To turn the dogs back was the work of an instant, and in the next he was speeding down through the north pass as though devil-driven. Halfway down, he halted and hid the corpse in the drift at the side of the way, kicking loose snow above it. Then he leaped on the

sledge and urged the dogs on recklessly.

On down the pass they flew. Far out on the Hunters' Road their master was still driving them in frenzied haste, nor stopped to camp and rest until he had put a full score of miles between himself and the still figure that lay beneath the snows.

He followed his own trail back, finding it unobliterated for long stretches in many places. When he was two hours from the ship, he drove the team off the trail at the side of a cliff, overturned the sledge, and shot the eight huskies, one by one, as they cowered and whimpered in their harness.

Taking to the road on foot, Scoland exerted his wiry strength to the utmost, and his exhaustion of body was not all simulated when he staggered into the winter camp of the expedition on the bay shore. A storm had arisen, and none of the men was abroad when the captain reached the camp. He reeled to the door of the first shack and knocked. When the door was opened, he fell on his face within. His face was frost-nipped, and he had purposely exposed his hands and arms to the blasts as much as he dared, not wishing to disable himself permanently.

Consternation thrilled through the shack on his appearance, and there was a rush of questioning men. Brandy was poured down his throat, and his limbs were chafed with snow as he lay in well-feigned unconsciousness.

When he opened his eyes again, Scoland waved the eager men aside weakly.

"Take me to the ship," he commanded.

Tender hands bore him to a boat. Once in his cabin on the *Minnetonka*, he ordered Lieutenant Everson to strike the shore camp at once, and make preparations for an immediate departure.

"Tell the men that the Sardanian relief expedition is a complete failure," he said wearily. "Three of our men—God rest them—have lost their lives—"

"What!" Everson exclaimed. "Wright and Janess! Are they gone?"

Scoland nodded. "Yes, and Parkerson, too, poor fellow. The valley of Sardanes—I have been there—lies buried under many feet of snow. Its people must have perished months ago. Not one trace of humanity did I find there, except one old stone building in the shadow of the cliffs at the north end of the valley."

"But the other party, and their dog team—are you sure?" Everson gasped.

"Sure—too sure," replied Scoland. "I found their bones in the snow beside their sledge, not five miles from the valley. They never reached it. How they died was impossible to tell. Their bones were picked clean by the bears. Their dogs may have gone mad with the snow distemper and turned on them when one of them slept on his watch; the bears may have attacked them in force; a sudden tempest may have overwhelmed them—I could not tell. They are gone. We buried them in the snow.

"I think probably it was the dogs. Mine turned on me. We were on the way back, Parkerson and I. The brutes went mad. They pulled him down before I could get them. He was on watch, and I was asleep. I—I shot them all—but it was too late. I buried him in the snow, also, and came on alone and on foot. My God, what a journey!

"Tell Lennon to put up a tablet on the headland above the bay. Get up steam and let us get away from this accursed land before some mishaps engulfs us all."

Groaning, he turned his swollen face to the wall.

Everson went on deck and imparted the news to the members of the crew. The men gathered aft, while the young lieutenant read the burial service. Within six hours the bay shore was deserted and the *Minnetonka* was churning northward, a long wake of black smoke trailing over the waters behind her.

CHAPTER VII

FOLLOWING NATURE'S TRAIL

Polaris drove his weary and dispirited dogs back along the trail to the little camp. In the breast of the man burned an anger that made him tireless, and that was proof against both the cold and the storm.

When he arrived at the camp he found the tall form of the Sardanian king standing on guard. The Princess Memene, who had adapted herself to their necessities with the bravery and fortitude of the true woman, was busy about the portable oil cook stove in the shelter tent. Zenas Wright slumbered peacefully in his sleeping bag.

Minos strode through the snow to meet the white-clad figure that urged on the drooping brutes. Polaris greeted him with a strange smile.

"What hath happened thee, my brother?" questioned the king; "misfortune, it seemeth, from thy mien. Hath aught befallen thy ship?"

"This hath happened, O Minos," Polaris replied, leaning on his spear; "the ship hath hailed into the north, and we four be left to travel as seemeth us best for many a long hundred miles of perils, an the tempests claim us not."

"Sailed—the ship! What mean—" and Minos paused. Here was a matter that defied question.

He looked wonderingly at the son of the snows.

"Dost find it a riddle, Minos?" said Polaris with a hard laugh. "Well, so do I also—a riddle that much I hope I shall one day have the reading of." His anger came upon him again, and he clenched his strong hands on the spear shaft so that the tough wood crackled in his grip.

"Many things might have happened, Minos. Some one thing *hath* happened. The ship that should have been our rescue and our refuge is surely gone, and on a rock yonder by the sea did I find writing on a wooden slab that told of mine own death, and that of the old man, Zenas Wright, and that of still another man of the ship's company."

"Another man of thy ship's company?" Minos said. His face grew stern. "A man lay dead in the north pass of Sardanes, and who did not die of age or sickness." The king glanced sharply at Polaris. "Couple that with the double trail in the snow, my brother, and it is my mind that thou art not far from reading of the riddle. Is it not so?"

"Mayhap," answered Polaris. "Yet would I do no man injustice by giving word to that which is not proved."

"That, too, is well," said the king. "And now, for us, what is thy counsel?"

"Let us wake the old man and the three of us make a plan," Polaris replied. He tethered and fed the dogs, and the two men entered the tent.

Zenas Wright opened his eyes and blinked when Polaris shook him by the shoulder. He straightway thrust out his hand.

"The flask, my son," he said with a droll smile; "I trust you filled it. Not that I am what you'd call a toper, but I surely dreamed of that cognac."

"With all the heart of me, old man, do I hope for the fulfillment of that dream," said Polaris, and handed back the empty flask. "That it will be soon, the chances are most slender. Every passing hour is adding leagues to the distance between this empty bottle and the cask with which it is acquainted."

Zenas Wright heard the tale of the shipless harbor, and met it like a philosopher.

"So Scoland's gone," he said slowly. His old blue eyes narrowed a bit as he thought, but he, too, held his tongue

from his suspicions.

They held a council, three men and a woman, one old and wise in the ways of the world, one to whom civilization was but a foster mother, and two true children of a prehistoric past. The other three looked by common consent to Polaris as the guiding spirit in this extremity.

"We are in your hands, now, my son," said the old scientist. "I guess you are the leader of the Sardanian relief expedition. What shall it be?"

"Two courses be open," Polaris said. "We can go back to the cave in Sardanes and there live our lives and die our appointed deaths, for, truly, I think no living man will ever come and seek us there. We can strike out for the north over that path of many dangers, which I followed once aforetime, with the Rose. And then, when we are come up to the great seas that lie above this frozen land, if we take that course, we must chance a rescue by some wandering ship—a small chance, but I speak for that risk. Death lies at the ends of all paths, and I think it better to meet it in the midst of our strong endeavor than to have it find us out while we lie meekly to wait for it. What say you, friends?"

Zenas Wright reached him a gnarled hand. "I'm with you, my lad," said he. "I had hoped to lay a report of some moment before my colleagues of the Geo-graphical Society. I still have that hope. If there is a man in the world who can guide us safely through the dangers which face us, you are that man. And, if we fail, and leave our bones on the road—well—I'm for the North."

Polaris translated to the two Sardanians. "Not two courses, my brother, but one, let us say," said Minos gravely, and he, too, put his hand in the hand of Polaris. "Let us fare along the northern road, and win through or die. Myself and my princess, with only our poor knowledge, would have tried that path had we lived until the light came, if you had not come seeking us."

After a day's rest they turned their faces to the east and followed the chain of the barrier range until they reached once more the Hunters' Road. There they made a camp in the trail, while Polaris took the gray dogs of Minos, which were stronger, and which had learned to obey him, and drove through to Sardanes. From the cave on Mount Latmos he took of the stores of meats and grain all that he dared to load onto the sledge. They would need all the supplies that they might carry with them.

Fearless in the face of their disasters, the members of the little party rested their hopes on the broad shoulders of the son of the wilderness, and they began their bitter drive. That leader set his tireless strength and will of iron to the task, with a silent tongue and a flame in his heart—a flame and a vision of a dear face a continent and a half away to the north, that he swore he would live to see again.

When men had failed them and fortune had seemed to turn her face away, a mighty friend aided them—no less a one than old Mother Nature. The path that might have been so beset with hardships, she elected to make smooth, and tempered even her wild winds, so that the going of the travelers was more swift than they had dared to hope.

Long before they came to the notch in the chain of ice mountains, through which Polaris had passed north on his previous journey, they reached the monstrous seam that the furious volcanic fires had left across the southern continent when they had poured from their ancient bed in Sardanes to rear their flaming bulwarks on the shores of Ross Sea.

Where the fiery torrents had burst through under the barrier range, the mountains must have been but empty shells of volcanoes active ages ago. One of them had collapsed. Where once it had reared its snow-capped peak, was now a jagged gash like a broken wall.

Through that gash the travelers went. It took them all of an arduous day's labor to reach a spot from where they could see on ahead—labor that was wasted, should they find that the lands beyond offered no hope of a pathway. Most of the way the dogs were useless. The brutes finally had been whipped into a semblance of amity, and flocked

along without fighting; more, it is true, through fear of the ready lash than because of any love between the two breeds. With all their weights of food and trappings the sledges were lifted by the son of the snows and the Sardanian, and carried over many a torn and twisted scar in the half-healed breast of the mountain.

If the thews of Polaris were more mighty than those of the king, in endurance the men were equal. They performed feats that, perhaps no other two men in the whole world could have accomplished.

At last they gained a height in the pass from where the miles lay spread out before them. As far as their eyes could see was a mark across the land, as though a mighty iron wheel, white hot, had turned its slow way northward, searing everything that it could not crush. Not all the snows that had fallen had been sufficient to obliterate that trail.

"There, my son, lies a road that we cannot lose," said Zenas Wright when he set eyes on it. "And we know where it leads to—straight to Ross Sea. There, above the volcanic area, is the most likely place of all in the Antarctic regions for a ship to come."

"Aye, Zenas Wright, it is a good, broad roadway," Polaris said. "It will be the play of children to follow it, set against the difficulties of that other path to the east, which I took."

On through the pass they struggled, and were on the plain beyond in three days. The pathway of the fires was not so smooth to follow as it had looked from afar, but still offered no great obstacles. Once more the long whiplashes sang over the galloping dogs, and Polaris, who had not sung in many weeks, lifted his voice as he ran in a lilt that quivered across the snows and woke strange echoes from the cliffs.

Most wonderful of all the journey was the wiry, dogged strength of Zenas Wright. Hour by hour the old man toiled on with the younger, seeming never to tire. When, they insisted that he ride on one of the sledges, it was always under protest that he did so.

Often he tapped the pocket in which he still carried an empty flask. "I'm just chasing the fellow that went north with my cognac," he would say, or some other quip that exhibited his undaunted spirit and helped to hearten his companions.

Of a like spirit was the Princess Memene, and tender and gracious and true. No hardship of the many that were her lot wrung word of complaint from the lips of the bride of Minos. Only as they proceeded farther north, they noticed that she seemed to tire more easily, and rode more upon the sledge, and noticing, they were much concerned thereat. But Memene seemed not a whit concerned, meeting their solicitude with a brave show of strength, and smiling gently to herself oftentimes when no one saw.

Came a day when far on the northern horizon they saw low-hanging clouds of curling smoke, and when a north wind brought an acrid smart to their eyes, and a tempering of the atmosphere.

"Yonder flame the moons of thy Sardanes," Polaris said to Minos, and the king nodded and his eyes grew sad with memory.

Two days' travel brought them to the foothills of the coast range of mountains, into which the volcanic torrent had broken. Then they were forced to make a detour inland, to seek a gap through which they might approach Ross Sea. About them was little snow, on the mountains none at all, and the climate was such that the members of the party had to shed their heavy parkas.

"Never a need to freeze here," said Polaris, "or to starve either, while there be bears to kill." Not a single monarch of the wastes had they encountered in all their journey, but, as they approached the volcanoes, signs had not been lacking that bears were to be found in the neighborhood.

As there was lack of snow on which to sledge, Polaris deemed it best to find out where they could best make their way through to the sea before attempting the labor of dragging the vehicles on any needless path.

With Minos and the old man he rolled boulders in a ring around a hollow in the side of a cliff and set up a camp there—a welcome home for a time at least to Zenas Wright. Now that the goal of their journeying was near, the geologist was not ashamed to admit that he was weary.

Several times Polaris explored without success paths that seemed likely, and at length marked one that led, by devious turns and detours, to the open water. Following it through to the shore, he penetrated north along the coast a number of miles. He found that there which sent him back to camp on flying feet.

"Now are our troubles at an end!" he shouted. "I have found a ship!"

Scoland and his men had been a half day on their northern journey when the *Minnetonka's* wireless operator brought to Scoland's cabin the following message:

Earthquake or volcano cut ship off from sea. Fear in great danger.

Aronson,
Felix.

Directing the operator to answer that they were on their way north, Scoland gave the orders that hurled the cruiser on with redoubled speed to meet this new peril!

Icebergs floated along their sea path, but in diminished numbers, and in size far inferior to those whose menace had made the great southern drive and jam so perilous to the ship. When they reached the lower neck of Ross Sea, the passage that had taken twenty-nine days of weary and dangerous labor, blasting every rod of the way through the solid ice of the jam, was accomplished in four hours.

Wireless exchanges kept them informed that the position of the *Felix* was unchanged. Scoland found her at the upper end of Ross Sea, cut off from open water. As islands appear suddenly from the depths of the South Pacific, so had the volcanic forces upheaved the Antarctic sea bottom. The *Felix* had ridden at anchor in a sheltered bay. Now she lay in a basin, surrounded entirely by land and rocks. A strip nearly two hundred yards across separated the ship from the tossing open waters of the sound. So shallow was the water where the ship was that the vessel had heeled over and lay on her starboard side, her decks tilted at a precipitous angle.

Scoland saw at once that his supply ship was hopeless of rescue. It would have taken tons of explosive to blast a channel to where she lay, and, that accomplished, there would be no water to float her. Off the edge of the strip of sea bottom that had been thrown up by the volcanoes, the water was some twelve fathoms.

Scoland laid the cruiser alongside the ledge, rigged carrying tackle, and spent two days replenishing the coal bunkers of the *Minnetonka*, to the great satisfaction of Engineer MacKechnie, who was assured that, if the cruiser failed to escape from the jaws of the southland, it would not be from lack of coal for her engines.

Aronson and his crew, choosing between a swaying shore and a heaving sea bottom, had left the *Felix* and made camp among the rocks inland, where, instead of the antarctic rigors of climate to be expected in that latitude, they were oppressed by almost torrid heat, the result of their volcanic surroundings. Very glad were all of them, to feel the decks of the steel cruiser beneath their heels; and would have been willing to chance the seas with depleted coal bunkers to hurry their departure from a place where, as the Swedish ship's master said, "the Almighty had put them in dry dock, and they hadn't been able to figure out whether He was going to spill a new sea or build an island."

Leaving the sturdy old *Felix* mewed up to be the prey of what chance or providence rules the ordering of volcanoes, the cruiser struck out for the north and America.

* * *

On a blustering March morning, Captain James Scoland sat in the reception hall of an ancient homestead in

Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, and told his story to a sad-eyed young woman, a young woman who did not weep, but whose tightened lips and wistful gaze told of a grief that tears could not soften or relieve.

By cable and by wireless from South American shores, days before, had come speeding on electric wings the tidings of the failure of the Sardanian relief expedition. All America had been thrilled with sorrow and pity at the news, sorrow for the famous scientist who had lost his life on his chosen path, and for the equally famous son of the wildernesses, Polaris Janess, who had trodden that path to death with him; pity for the unknown nation that had been crushed out by inexorable nature, and pity most of all for the gray-eyed girl who sat alone in her Boston mansion, grieving for a hero-lover lost.

The captain finished his tale. "And so there was nothing to do but to come back," he said; "and I have come. And, Rose, is there nothing I can say that will bring back to your eyes the light I used to know there?"

Rose Emer did not answer him. She sat looking at the wall, seeing through it and beyond it. Many a thousand miles away her fancy pictured clearly a great plain of ice and rocks and snows, storm-swept by shrieking tempests. She saw a dismantled sledge half covered by the drifting white, and beside it a lowly mound, the monument above all the hopes and joy of her young life. She shuddered, and a little bitter cry of desolation burst from her lips. At her feet a great gray dog raised himself on his forefeet, rested his shaggy head upon her knees and whined uneasily.

Scoland arose and stood beside her. As if he divined the heart of the man, gray Marcus left his place at the feet of his mistress and stalked across the hall to the doorway, where he stood watching the visitor with gloomy eyes of distrust and menace. The hair around the great brute's neck was ruffled, and his powerful muscles were flexed. Neither the man nor woman took heed of Marcus. He stood quietly, but very watchful.

"Rose, dear Rose, can it be that this wild man from the wilderness held such power over you that you have forgotten all that we once were to each other?" Scoland said, his emotions fast carrying him beyond caution, or comprehension of the fitness of time or place.

Rose Emer raised her head suddenly and looked into the man's burning, brooding eyes.

"What do you mean, Captain Scoland?" she said with quiet dignity, but with a mounting flush on her cheeks and a flash in her eyes that boded rising indignation. "You forget—"

"No, Rose, I do *not* forget," he interrupted. "I shall never forget that you were mine first, and were stolen from me. Janess, who held you in the glamor of romance, is gone now. We have the present to face, with its things as they are—the future with things as they may be, if we will them so. Is it too much for me to hope that some time—not now, I know, but some time—we may take up our lives where they once seemed to be shaping, and live them on—together?"

Before the girl opened her lips to speak, Scoland read her answer in her eyes, in the angry tilt of her chin. It maddened him beyond restraint.

"God!" he cried, "Is that accursed barbarian to stand forever at each turn of my life and thwart me?" His voice rose into a shrill shriek. "No! No!" he shouted. "Not to be balked like this have I risked my eternal soul to hell fire! You were, you are, you shall be mine. Mine! *Mine!*"

Cast loose in his madness from all moorings of caution, he sprang at the girl, his arms outstretched to seize her and crush her to him.

"Stop!" The voice of Rose Emer rang out, clear and commanding. She leaped from her chair and backed against the wall, checking him with outstretched hand. Her deep eyes were aflame with anger. "You shall not touch me. You have insulted a noble man who is dead. Your words are an insult to me also. I will not listen to you. Go!" She pointed to the door.

Attracted by the loud voices, a gray-haired butler came hesitatingly into the room from the back of the house. "William," said the girl, "you will please open the door for this man."

But Scoland did not heed. It is to be doubted if he even heard her; and, if he did, her words fell meaningless on

his ears. Whirled on in the rush of his emotion, he thrust the chair from his way and approached her. She struck him in the face with her clenched hands, but without effect. His arms were closing around her. She felt his hot breath on her cheek.

The butler, who had stood aghast for an instant, started hastily to cross the room to the assistance of his mistress, but he was not needed.

An eye more keen by far than that of the aged servant had watched the course of events, and a force more powerful than his now intervened.

Scoland's hand had just touched the girl's shoulder when a bolt of living fury shot across the hall and hurled him so violently against the wall that its stout oaken, panels-quivered, and he went down under the weight of gray Marcus. Over-leaping in his rage, the dog missed his aim, which was the man's neck. The gnashing fangs closed on Scoland's cheek, below the left eye, and tore the flesh down to the chin. His victim down, the furious animal crouched on the body, worrying it horribly.

Instinctively, Scoland threw up his arms to protect his throat. The brute seized on one of his bare hands, and the bones crunched in the grip of the iron jaws. Screaming aloud, the man sought to roll over on his face. The sharp teeth ripped through his sleeves and deep into the biceps of his right arm.

Rose Emer stood paralyzed in white horror against the wall. Blood spurted from Scoland's mangled face and stained her skirts.

"Marcus! Back, Marcus!" she cried.

The fighting blood of the dog was up, and she might as well have commanded the wind. She threw her arms around the shaggy neck of the brute and strove with all her strength to drag him from the shrieking, slaving creature that had been James Scoland. Combe, the butler, came to her aid, bringing a heavy oak chair, a leg of which he thrust between the dog's jaws. Between them, the man and the girl finally tore Marcus from his prey, and his mistress led him, still snarling hideously, into another room and shut him in.

With the help of Combe, Scoland dragged himself to his feet and stood leaning heavily on a chair, his breath coming in great gasps. One glance Rose Emer had of his ghastly, disfigured countenance, and averted her eyes with a shudder. His punishment had been swift and horrible, more so than she knew. It was not alone the flesh that Marcus had marred. The brain had given way also.

Commanding his laboring breath, Scoland shook his uninjured hand at the shrinking girl.

"Curse you!" he cried, his voice rising into an unnatural screech. "Curse you and your devil-brute! May your heart rot in loneliness, waiting for your wild man. He'll never find his way back from where I left him. He'll die hard, for he is strong. He will starve and wander and go blind and mad—as I am going mad, and then he'll freeze—very slowly, and die—and come and haunt me—"

"What are you saying!" Rose Emer sprang toward him. She forced her unwilling eyes to look upon that terrible face. "You *left* him, you say? *Alive*?"

Scoland threw back his head and laughed—the shrill, terrifying laughter of a maniac.

"Yes, I left him," he croaked hoarsely, "left him, alive, he and the doddering old man. Ha! ha! ha! I reached Sardanes and found them there, and they didn't see me. Ha! ha! I came away again, and they didn't know, I left them, with a dead man to keep them company—in frozen, dead Sardanes—"

He caught sight of his face in a mirror, and his voice broke.

"My God!" he whispered. He held his arms out toward his reflection in the glass. "God!" he repeated, and collapsed on the floor in a fit of convulsions.

Combe and other servants brought ropes and tied him.

A little later men came and took Captain James Scoland away.

Like a far-flung, radiant ray of dazzling sunshine, one fact penetrated through all the horror of the moment to the heart of Rose Emer. Polaris, her Polaris, was alive! Alive, and living, might be saved—*must* be saved! She left the horrors of the hall on flying feet.

Before the madman was out of her house, Rose Emer had called up Washington on the long-distance telephone, and had spoken with the Secretary of the Navy.

Enough of English had the Sardanians learned to understand the words of Polaris, when he shouted that he had found a ship, and their glad exclamations were mingled with those of Zenas Wright, as the three sprang to meet the returning explorer.

"A ship, said I," Polaris said, lifting his his hand, "but naught did I say of men or rescue. 'Tis the *Felix*, caught fast in the rocks by some mischance that is our great good fortune. She has been abandoned." He made haste to explain how he had found the ship. "Unless Scoland found means to empty her, which seems unlikely," he continued, "she has that on board to keep us four in comfort for years, if need be."

Breaking camp at once, they followed his lead through the mountain gap to the rocky shore.

Aye, there lay the *Felix*, right enough, and snug in her basin, but how were they on shore to reach her?

Polaris did not delay for long in solving that problem. Stripping Minos's sledge of hymanan wood of all its load, he set it afloat in the basin. It served him in lieu of a raft. For a paddle he took his long spear and poled his improvised craft out on the still waters of the miniature sea. It floated him safely, although his weight submerged it so that the water lapped at his ankles.

"Give me that flask, old Zenas Wright," he cried joyously. "I'll warrant you wait not long for the filling of it now, even if I have to desert this stout boat, and swim to the ship."

In a few minutes he had poled his way to where the *Felix* lay, her decks far aslant, but her rail still above water. To board her, he was forced to leap from the floating sledge. He caught the rail, with his hands and pulled himself aboard. He clambered up the tilting deck and forced the forward hatch, which had been battened down by Scoland's men. Below decks he found all right and tidy. A glance into the hold discovered its stores of supplies almost intact. At least, he and his companions faced no menace of starvation.

Returning to the deck, he made his way aft, and opened the cabin hatch. He found the storeroom where the ship's, supply of spirits was kept, and smashed in the door with a blow of his foot. Smiling as he did so, he filled the flask of Zenas Wright.

As he emerged on deck once more, he glanced shoreward. Danger, white, cruel, and desperate, was stalking his companions and they knew it not. From his position of vantage on the deck of the *Felix*, Polaris saw a moving mass that showed silver against its dark background in the rocks some hundred feet back from the shore of the basin, where his fellow travelers were waiting for him. Gliding among the boulders, with all the sinuous caution of a cat intent upon a group of mice, an immense polar bear was creeping to attack them!

Noiselessly, the great brute crept on in the cover of the rocks. The wind blew from the party, so that the keen-nosed dogs were unaware of the presence of a foe, and sounded no alarm.

Across the waters Polaris sent a warning shout. "A white bear!" he shouted, pointing, "in the rocks behind you! Ready with your guns if he charges!"

As he raised his voice a change in the wind or some other appeal to their finely attuned senses, informed the dogs that their foe was near. Gray runners and brown turned to face the rocks, every neck bristling. Stimulated by the brave demeanor of the fearless children of Pallas, the huskies' ugly snouts were as snarlingly defiant as the

others.

Over the rocks and into the open clambered the bear. His flanks were lean, and he was hunger-mad, to the point where numbers did not daunt him. He stood uncertain for but a moment, then broke into a lumbering, padded gallop, which, clumsy as it seemed, would have pressed a fleet runner hard to distance. A menacing roar answered the ear-splitting clamor of the dogs.

Wright and the Sardinian seized rifles from the sledge. Sternly, calling back the dogs, they opened fire together. Minos, a novice in the use of the weapon, missed widely at the first shot, and in his haste jammed the lever of his rifle. The bullet of Zenas Wright, who was always an indifferent marksman, only grazed the flank of the bear, injuring him little and adding much to his rage. Again the geologist fired, but did not stop the great brute. The galloping monster was close upon them.

As he shouted his warning from the ship Polaris scrambled to the nearest davits that swung a boat. With no time to manipulate the ropes, he cut through them with his keen knife, and leaped for the boat as it fell. More by good fortune than else, the craft was not swamped. The son of the snows headed inshore, pulling so powerfully at the oars that their oaken lengths bent to his strokes. Swiftly, as moved the boat, the drama ashore was played through before its prow touched the rocks.

Once more the scientist pressed the trigger in desperation, but a leaping, frenzied dog struck him from behind in the hollows of his knees, spoiling his aim, and sending him sprawling on his face. Minos's spear lay buried under the load that had been cast from his sledge. The third rifle was out of order and useless. Weaponless, he stood in the front of the charging enemy, except for his dagger and the light rifle, which he now clubbed and swung over his shoulder—a slight defense against the onset of the polar monster.

As the bear reached him, it reared on its hind legs, towering far above even the great height of the king. One vast forepaw, armed with its formidable talons, swung high to strike. Aloft, also went the steel rifle in the grip of Minos. With the agility and eye of a trained boxer, the bear, even as it struck out with one paw, whirled the other with lightning quickness. The gun was torn from Minos's grasp, and spun through the air, to fall with a splash many feet out in the waters of the basin.

From the falling stroke of the crescent claws the king sprang back, snatching his dagger from his belt. Around him seethed the dogs, his own good gray beasts, no longer to be restrained from the battle, the huskies hanging doubtfully behind them. The white giant seemed to have marked the Sardinian for his prey, for, paying no attention to the dogs, he came on in a vengeful rush that they could not stop.

With his back to the sledge, Minos bestrode the body of Zenas Wright, who had struck his head against a rock, and lay stunned. Dark was the outlook. A woman's hand turned the balance. Tearing in desperate haste at the packs that had been thrown from their sledge, the Princess Memene strove to reach the spear of Minos, but found another weapon first.

Again the bear reared to attack, when over Minos's shoulder was thrust a broad and shining blade of ilium. With a shout, the king let fall the puny dagger, and gripped hard the hilt of the good sword under whose razor edge many a stout Sardinian had fallen. Swiftly he swung the great blade, and far out, all the weight of his shoulders behind the stroke.

Before the bear could strike again, the sword hit him in the side, well below the shoulder, and so deeply that he howled in agony, and fell to all fours.

Immediately he was all but buried by a wave of maddened dogs. Drenched with the blood that spurted from the sword gush, the king leaped to one side, whirling the heavy weapon aloft. Once more the bear essayed to rear, and to shake from him the swarming furies that hung at his sides, and clung to his jowls.

His mighty head, blood-bedabbled and fearful, rose out of the ruck of dogs. It offered a fair mark to the

watchful king. Down came the glittering blade, the air whining under it, and struck on the bear's neck. The bones parted under the stroke. So deeply had it bitten, that the sword was wrenched from Minos's hand.

With a last convulsive effort that threw the dogs from him, the polar monster arose to his full height and toppled backward, crashing to earth, stone dead.

Zenas Wright came to his senses a few moments later, with an unmistakable tang of cognac in his throat, and an aroma in the air that made him smile, despite the pain of his bruised head.

"It's a brave spirit," he gasped. Then he got up and extended his hand to the Sardanian king. "I guess I owe my life to a braver," he added. "My friend, I thank you."

Minos understood a part of the remark. He grasped the proffered hand with a deprecating shake of his head.

Untroubled by the fears which had driven Aronson and his men from the ship, the members of the party took up their quarters on the *Felix*, drawing upon her inexhaustible stores for comforts which had long been denied to them.

For two of them, the ship was a revelation of wonders undreamed of. Machinery, books—a hundred and one things were marvels to the two Sardanians. They learned with an eagerness that was almost childlike, absorbing knowledge against the coming of that time, so hoped for, when they should become of the great world of their visions. That, having come this far, they would reach that goal of their desires, they did not doubt.

To Polaris Janess and the geologist the situation was more serious. They knew that the chances were few that any ship should penetrate into Ross Sea, perhaps in many years. The Pole had been discovered. The Smalley and Hinson exploring expedition had come and gone. There was no reason of which the scientist and his companion knew to call other men to brave the perils of the Antarctic.

"If we are ever to get out of here, we must help ourselves, lad," Zenas Wright said to Polaris, as they discussed their plight several days after their coming to the ship. He shook his white head. "It seems just about hopeless. There's only one way, and that's by water, and we're cut off from the sea, even if we could navigate the ship, which is doubtful."

"But a boat—" Polaris began.

"Suicide!" exclaimed the old man. "One of those shells wouldn't live for five miles. Even if it should, they are not large enough to hold the four of us and the things which it would be absolutely necessary for us to have. Once away from this volcanic neighborhood we have a long stretch of icy sea to traverse. The nearest land where we should find aid is New Zealand, and that is more than two thousand miles to the north."

"There's a large boat with an engine and a sail," Polaris said, "but it is in pieces."

"What's that!" shouted Zenas Wright, "an auxiliary launch? Lead me to it, boy! Pieces or no pieces, we can put it together. I know enough for that, with you two strapping big fellows to help. If there's enough gasoline aboard to run her when she's assembled, we will have to chance her. It's our only chance."

Without delay the two of them scrambled along the slanted decks. Aft of the deckhouse, under her tarpaulin, they found the launch. As Polaris had said, she was in pieces. Only the hull lay on the deck of the *Felix*, a stout twenty-five-foot craft. Her sixty horsepower engine, and her auxiliary mast, sail and jib were below decks.

Zenas Wright looked her over with flashing eyes. "If there's gasoline enough we may make it," he said. "We've got to make it!" He did a mental computation. "It's a rough two thousand miles to New Zealand. Let's see. If you can steer, son, and I think you can, running twenty-four hours a day, and using the sails to save gas, when we can, we can make it in a month—if we meet no obstacles; which, of course, we will. We must provision for two months. If that doesn't take us through, God rest our souls!"

"Set us at work, for there is need for haste," Polaris said. "We must be out of this place before winter closes in above us." He called the Sardanian.

In the paint locker and the hold they found gasoline, twenty, twenty-five gallon tanks of it—more than they could take with them. Under Zenas Wright's directions, they, coaled the donkey engine on the forecastle head, rigged tackle to the mainmast, and hauled the engine up through the hatch. Many hours were spent in searching for various parts of the mechanism which they heeded, but they found it all at last.

The patient mechanical knowledge of the scientist was equal to the task of installing the engine. With that in its place, they stepped the mast, hauled the gasoline tanks on deck and shipped their cargo. With spirits new in the hope, their work aroused, they sang at their labors. Memene, who had drooped, regained her usual vigor and vivacity.

So stoutly did the two young giants set their hands to their task that within four days of the time they started they attached the sturdy launch to the davits and swung her over the side of the *Felix* by aid of the invaluable donkey engine. Zenas Wright immediately went aboard and tried out the engine. He spent the most of another day tinkering with the mechanism until it suited him, and then announced that they were ready for their perilous dash for the open sea and freedom.

The ring of rock that had made the *Felix* prisoner did not offer the same obstacle to the launch that it did to the greater ship. Near the north coast of the bay was a channel deep enough so that the launch could barely pass through to the sea. In a number of places it was so narrow that Wright and Janess were forced to use drills and dynamite, and blow away projecting rocks.

It was a great regret to the voyagers that they could not take their dogs with them. There was not room on the launch for the animals and food for them. Zenas Wright, now formally nominated the leader of the expedition, by right of his knowledge of navigation, compromised to the extent of carrying along two of the gray brutes of Minos, named Kalor and Thetis. But the old man conditioned that, if it came to a question of food scarcity, the brutes would have to be done away with. The rest of the animals they turned loose ashore.

Not forgotten in their preparations for departure, was the wealth of Sardanian rubies. Finding a small leather traveling bag on board the *Felix*, Polaris packed it with the skin sacks in which they had placed the gems before they had left the cave on Latmos.

At last they bade farewell to the old *Felix*, now doubly deserted, and put out for the open seas. It was nearly three months since the two adventurers had left the *Minnetonka* to find Sardanes, when they passed out of the enclosed basin and turned the bow of the launch northward. Around them roared the volcanic mountains. They saw the last of the *Felix* through a falling storm of impalpable ashes, so thick that it darkened the sunlight.

Four weeks' steady progress, sailing when they could and using their treasured gasoline sparingly, carried them well above the Circle. Unceasing vigilance alone enable them to make that progress, surrounded as they were by the menace of floating ice, collision with which would have crushed their craft like an eggshell. When they made use of their sail, Polaris took long spells at the wheel; but when it was necessary to put the engine into commission old Zenas Wright could neither rest nor sleep.

Came a day when the Princess Memene whispered briefly in the king's ear the burden of a pretty secret that she could no longer bear to keep from him. Close enfolded in his arms, she told him that which caused him to flush as radiantly as she.

"Another king is coming," Minos murmured low. "Hail to the king! But alas, his sire hath for him no kingdom to rule, unless indeed one may be won in the land whither we are journeying."

"Mayhap not a king, but a princess," said Memene.

Strong of the hope that was in him, Minos made answer. "Nay, he shall be a king."

And after thoughtful pause he added, "We will call him Patrymion."

Thus was another incentive added, bidding the wanderers bend every effort to reach with speed the friendly arms of civilization.

* * *

When they came again to the region of nights and days they were forced to do their traveling by sunlight mostly, and at night to drift. Twice the chill in the air warned them just in the nick of time of the proximity of icebergs, and they escaped them by recourse to the engine.

Then a storm came up from the south-west and hurled them north under bare poles, with the prospect of utter destruction momentarily before them.

"Let it blow," said Zenas Wright grimly. "If we can only keep afloat, it's helping us north fast enough, and, besides, it saves gas."

North they went, and east, far out of the course they had laid for New Zealand. For two days and nights the gale held, dying away in the dawn of the third day. The first gray daylight found them tossing on a choppy sea. When the light came, and Zenas Wright was able to figure out their position, he announced that they were somewhere in the neighborhood of the Tubuai Islands, a French possession, and they decided to turn the prow of their boat in the direction of these islands.

Taking the glasses, Polaris climbed a few feet up the mast and swept the sea. He was unable to raise land in any direction.

What he did raise, however, sent him clattering back to the deck.

"A ship!" he cried, "Straight ahead of us, a steamship! I can see her smoke!"

"Look again, lad," said the practical Wright, "and tell us which way her smoke hangs, if you can."

"To the north," Polaris shouted a moment later. "And she's headed this way, too!"

With a splendid disregard for their remaining gasoline, the scientist forced his engine to its best efforts, and they soon were making eighteen knots on their way toward the stranger.

Nearer and nearer came the two craft together, and finally those on the launch saw the steamship swing off her southerly course and point straight toward them.

They had been sighted.

Suddenly Polaris, who had been studying the approaching ship through the glasses, threw them down and sent up a great shout:

"It's the *Minnetonka*!"

It was.

In another half hour they were alongside. A line was thrown them and made fast. Canny even in that moment of excitement, Zenas Wright opened a locker near the wheel, and buckled fast to his leathern belt the traveling bag that held the rubies of Sardanes.

While Polaris stood by with a boat-hook, fending the launch from the steel side of the cruiser, the other clambered up the ladder, Minos pausing to snatch up one of the gray dogs, climbing up with the animal tucked under his arm. Catching up the other dog, Polaris leaped into the ladder, and the deserted launch swung away from under him and passed out of their lives forever.

Once safely on the deck, Minos and, his bride stood clutching each other's hands and gazing wonderingly at the scene, so different from that of the only other ship they had ever set eyes on. Then, as the officers and crew came

forward in greeting, the Sardanian prince slid an arm protectingly about his princess and met them hand to hand, while Memene dimpled and blushed happily.

On the deck stood Lieutenant Everson, his eyes alight, his hands outstretched. Before the son of the snows could grip those outstretched palms, came flying feet.

"*Polaris!*"

In his dreams he had heard that voice, ringing nearly half way round the world. He opened his arms. His amber eyes looked into her long eyes of grey. Their lips clung.

"At last—my Rose Maid!"

This novel is the second in the trilogy which began with "Polaris—of the Snows." Each novel in the trilogy is complete in itself.

The third story is "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian," which will appear in a future issue of this magazine.

[End of *Minos of Sardanes*, by Charles B. Stilson]