

MARCH

Famous

25¢

FANTASTIC

Mysteries



**THE
MACHINE STOPS**
A NOVEL BY
WAYLAND SMITH



**BEFORE
I WAKE...**
by HENRY
KUTTNER

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Before I Wake

Date of first publication: 1945

Author: Henry Kuttner (1914-1958)

Date first posted: Jan. 19, 2021

Date last updated: Jan. 19, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210148

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

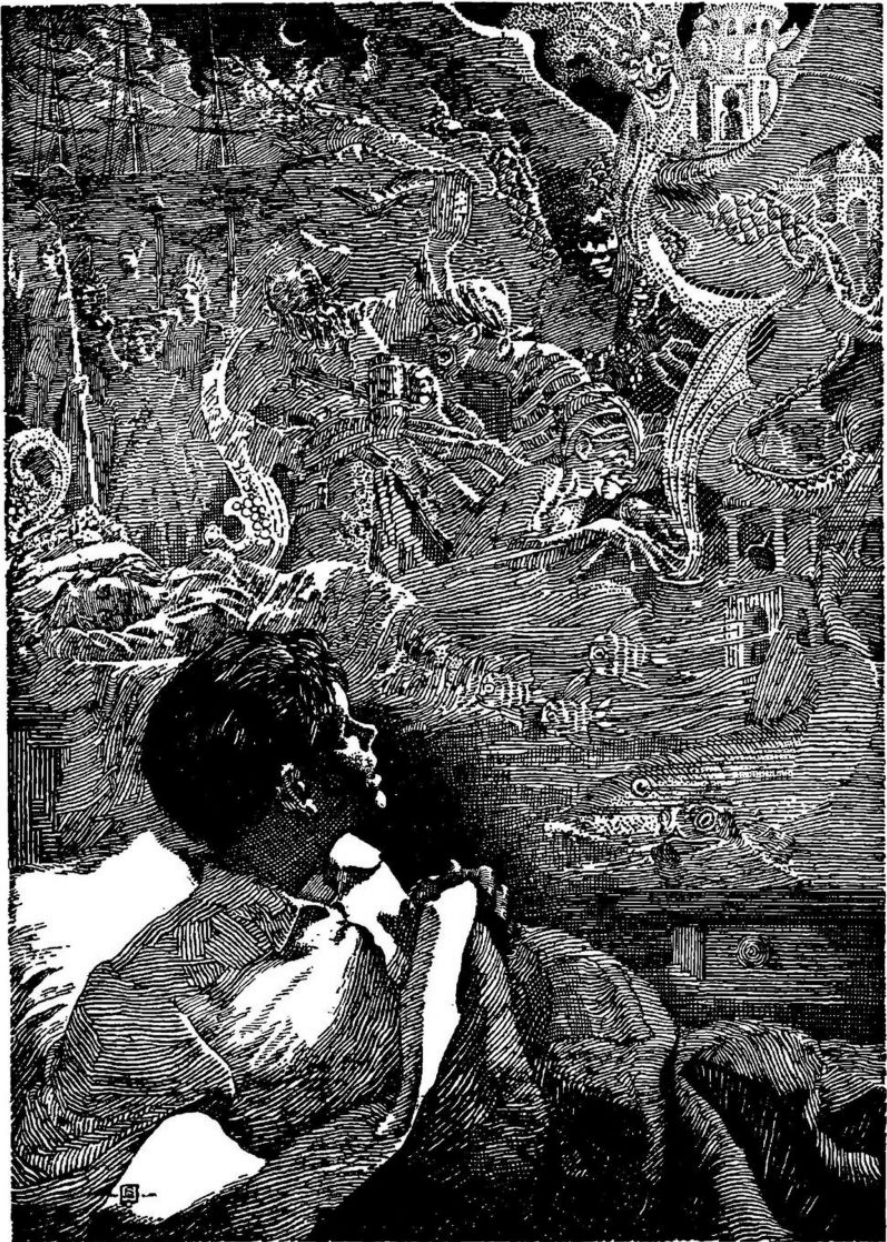
This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive/American Libraries.

BEFORE I WAKE . . .

By
Henry Kuttner

First published in *Famous Fantastic
Mysteries*, March 1945.

Brighter grew the vision that Pete saw of a land of beauty across the Seven Seas, and dimmer, more shadowy, grew the ugly world he lived in. . . . And all the while they called to him to come back, come back before it was too late!



Some day he'd be on his way to Cartagena and Juba, Juba where great processions moved with palanquins and purple banners to the clash of cymbals . . . and to all the wonderful places that he knew existed, if only one could get to them . . .

This is the story of a boy named Pete Coutinho, who had a spell put on him. Some people might have called it a curse. I don't know. It depends on a lot of things, on whether you've got gipsy blood, like old Beatriz Sousa, who learned a lot about magic from the wild *gitana* tribe in the mountains beyond Lisbon, and whether you're satisfied with a fisherman's life in Cabrillo.

Not that a fisherman's life is a bad one, far from it. By day you go out in the boats that rock smoothly across the blue Gulf waters, and at night you can listen to music and drink wine at the Shore Haven or the Castle or any of the other taverns on Front Street. What more do you want? What more is there?

And what does any sensible man, or any sensible boy, want with that sorcerous sort of glamor that can make everything incredibly bright and shining, deepening colors till they hurt, while wild music swings down from stars that have turned strange and alive? Pete shouldn't have wanted that, I suppose, but he did, and probably that's why there happened to him—what did happen. And the trouble began long before the actual magic started working.

Pedro Ignacio da Silva Coutinho, with a name far too long for his thin, wiry, fourteen-year old body, used to sit on the wharf, looking out at the bright blue-green Gulf water and thinking about what lay beyond that turquoise plain. He heard the men talking about Tampico and the Isle of Pines and such, and those names always held magic for him. Later on, when he got his growth, he intended to go to those places, and he knew what they'd look like.

The Isle of Pines was Circe's isle, with white marble columns here and there in the dark green, and pirates would be dueling with a flash of clashing swords and a flash of recklessly smiling white teeth. The Gulf, like the Caribbean, is haunted by the ghosts of the old buccaneers. Tampico, to Pete, wasn't the industrial shipping port his father knew. It had palaces and parrots of many colors, and winding white roads. It was an Arabian Nights city, with robed magicians wandering the streets, benign most of the time, but with gnarled hands like tree-roots that could weave spells.

Manoel, his father, could have told him a different story, for Manoel had shipped once under sail, in the old days, before he settled down to a fisherman's life in Cabrillo. But Manoel didn't talk a great deal. Men talk to men, not to boys, and that was why Pete didn't learn as much as he might have from the sun-browned Portuguese who went out with the fishing fleets. He got his knowledge out of books, and strange books they were, and strange knowledge.

Up on the hill, in a little white house, lived Dr. Manning, who had been a fixture there for decades. Dr. Manning spent his days puttering around in his garden and writing an interminable autobiography that would never be published. He liked Pete because the boy was quiet, and very often Pete could be found squatting cross-legged in some corner of the little house, turning over the pages of Manning's books. He dipped into them, tasting briefly, racing on, but always pausing over the colored plates by Rackham and Syme and John R. Neill, with their revelations of a world that was too bright and fascinating to be real.

And at first he knew it wasn't real. But the day-dreams grew and grew, as they will when a boy spends the lazy days idling in hot tropical sunlight by the canals with no one to talk to who thinks the thoughts he thinks. And pretty soon they *were* real, after all. There was an enormous map Dr. Manning had on the wall, and Pete would stand before it and trace imaginary voyages to the ports that fitted those glamorous pictures Rackham and Neill had painted.

Yes, they were real, finally.

Cartagena and Cocos, Clipperton Island and Campeche; he chased them down the alphabet he'd unwillingly learned at school, and they were all enchanted places. Clipperton was the haven of old ships. It couldn't be really an island, just hundreds and hundreds of the great Yankee clippers, with sails like white clouds, rails thronged with sailormen who hadn't died for good.

Not that Pete had any illusions about death. He'd seen dead men, and he knew that something goes out of a man—the soul goes out—when the lips slacken and the eyes stare emptily. Still and all, they could come back to life in Campeche and Cocos and in thunder-haunted Paramaribo, where dragons lived. But Paramaribo dragons could be killed by arrows dipped in the shining venom of the upas tree, which grew in a certain grove he'd discovered in a day-dream.

Then he found the toad. He was trailing his father, Manoel, one time, to make certain the old man didn't get too drunk and fall in one of the canals. It was Saturday night, when all good fishermen drink as much as they can hold, sometimes a little more. And Pete, a slim, silent watcher, would follow his father, darting through the shadows, ready to catch the unsteady figure if it lurched too close to the dark waters, or to yell for help if he couldn't.

Pete was thinking about a certain town he'd heard of named Juba, where there were—he could see them now—huge sleek black figures on golden thrones, and leopard skins, and he could hear the rolling of drums deep inside his head. His bare feet scuffed the dust through shafts of light that angled out from the windows, and discordant music came faintly from the Shore Haven down the road. Manoel had stopped and was kicking at something on the ground. It moved a little, and Manoel pursued it.

Pete edged closer, his eyes alert and curious. A small dark blotch hopped laboriously away from the drunken man's feet. Pete might have let his father crush the toad, but somehow he didn't, though he was no kinder than the average boy. It was Manoel's drunkenness that made Pete run forward. It was an idea, half-formulated in his mind, that a drunken giant could stamp out life into oblivion, and, maybe, that up in the starry sky were bigger giants who might get drunk sometime and send their feet crashing down on men. Well, Pete had funny ideas.

The important thing is that he ran in behind his father, sent the old man sprawling with a quick shove, and snatched up the toad. It was a cool, smooth weight in his hand. Manoel was yelling and cursing and trying to rise, but he thought that a coast guard patrol had run him down and tiger sharks were coming in fast, smelling the blood. Pretty soon he discovered the blood was only red wine, from the broken bottle in his pocket, and that distressed him so much he just sat there in the road and cried.

But Pete ran home with the cool, firm body of the toad breathing calmly in his hand. He didn't go into the shack where his mother was boiling strong coffee for Manoel's return. He circled it and went into the back yard, where he'd made a tiny garden by the fence. It would be nice to tell about how Pete loved flowers and had a bed of roses and fuchsias glowing amid the squalid surroundings, but as a matter of fact Pete grew corn, squash and tomatoes. Manoel would have disapproved of roses and clouted Pete across the head for growing them.

There were some rocks piled up near the garden, and Pete put the toad among them. And it was a funny thing, but Pete stayed right there, crouching on his knees, looking at the toad for a long time. There are little lights in a toad's eyes that flicker like lights in a jewel. And maybe there was something more in this toad's eyes.

You'll say it was dark in the back yard and Pete couldn't even see the toad. But the fact is he did see it, all right, and old Beatriz, the *gitana*, who knew more than she should have known about witches, might have explained a little. You see, a witch has to have a familiar, some little animal like a cat or a toad. He helps her, somehow. When the witch dies the familiar is suppose to die too, but sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes, if it's absorbed enough magic, it lives on. Maybe this toad found its way south from Salem, from the days when Cotton Mather was hanging witches. Or maybe Lafitte had a Creole girl who called on the Black Man in the pirate-haven of Barataria. The Gulf is full of ghosts and memories, and one of those ghosts might very well be that of a woman with warlock blood who'd come from Europe a long time ago, and died on the new continent.

And possibly her familiar didn't know the way home. There's not much room for magic in America now, but once there was room.

If you're thinking the toad talked to Pete in a voice he could hear, you're on the wrong track. I'm not saying something out of the ordinary didn't happen. It's possible that the toad looked into Pete's mind with its tiny, cool, quiet mind, and asked a question or two, and it's also possible that a little magic started working there in that dark, fish-smelling back yard, with the tin-pan music of Cabrillo's bars murmuring through the night. But I'm not saying it's so, either.

All that happened was that Pete went into the house and got slapped for leaving Manoel. Margarida, a short, fat woman with worried dark eyes, said that Manoel would certainly fall into a canal and be eaten by barracuda, and Manoel's family, including Pete, all his five brothers and sisters, and Margarida herself, would starve miserably. She worked it out in great detail, gesturing wildly. Then the coffee boiled over, and she rushed to save it and then gave Pete a cup.

Pete drank it and grinned at Gregorio, who was trying to sharpen a gaff with all the dexterity of his six-year-old hands.

"The father will be okay, *minha mae*," he told Margarida. "He is not so drunk."

"Pedrinho, Manoel is not young any more. You must go out on the boats yourself someday soon."

"Good!" Pete said, thinking rapturously of Campeche and Tampico. Perhaps Tampico did not really have magicians, after all, but the truth would be even more glamorous. Margarida looked at the boy and bit her lip. Well—*basta*, apron-strings have to be cut some day. It was not as if the boy were not always talking about sailing the Caribbean.

"Put the *criança* to bed, Pedrinho," she ordered, turning to the stove. So Pete collected Cypriano José, a chuckling, fat baby, and herded Gregorio before him into the next room.

In the dark, by the rock pile, the toad sat quietly, staring into the shadows with eyes that glittered like strange jewels.

For awhile that night Pete lay awake, his mind racing with vivid pictures of ships driving majestically through the oceans of the world. Someday he'd be on his way to Cartagena and Juba, Juba where heavy golden bracelets shone against satiny black skin, where great processions moved with palanquins and purple banners to the clash of cymbals and the mutter of drums. Cocos and Campeche and the Isle of Pines, where red-sashed pirates grinned in their beards and sang bloody songs. Tampico, where turbanned men called up afrits and jinn, and sleeping princesses lay in palaces of pearl. Clipperton of the white sails, Belém, where each white house had a bell-tower and the sweet chimes sang out forever in the peaceful valley.

Pete slept.

And then, somehow, the bed was revolving slowly. In Pete a dim excitement rose, and a consciousness that something was about to happen. As he slipped sidewise into mid-air he glimpsed rolling water below, and instinctively brought his hands together and straightened his knees. He cut the surface in a clean dive. Down and down he went, while his vision cleared and he saw, through a rush of bubbles, a clear, blue-green light.

He went slower and slower, turning his hands to slant to the surface, but not rising very fast. He had been holding his breath. Now, as a barracuda came nosing toward him through a forest of wavering weeds, fear made him kick out convulsively and he sucked in a gasp. He expected strangling water to gush into his lungs, but there was no discomfort at all. He might have been breathing air.

The barracuda swam up after him. One of his flailing hands struck the fish, and it darted away. Pete saw its torpedo body dwindling down the long, blue-green vista. Hanging there, automatically treading water, he began to realize what lay around and beneath him.

This was the southern sea. The colors that fade when coral is drawn out of its element were garishly bright here, intricate and lovely labyrinths on the bottom. Among the coral, fish went darting, and overhead a sea-bat, a devilfish, flapped slow wings past, its stingaree tail trailing. Morays coiled by, opening their incredible, wolfish mouths at him, and many-limbed crabs scuttled sidewise over the rocks and little sandy plateaus of the bottom. Groves of seaweed and great fans of colored sponges swung with hypnotic motion, and schools of tiny striped fish went flashing in and out among them, moving all together as if with a single mind.

Pete swam down. From a cavern among the brown and purple rocks an octopus looked at him out of huge, alien eyes. Its tentacles hung and quivered. Pete swam away, hovering over an expanse of pale sand where the light from above shimmered and ran in rippling waves, his own shadow hanging spread-eagled below him. In and out of it many little creatures went scuttling busily on their underwater errands. Life here was painted in three dimensions, and there was no gravity. There was only beauty and strangeness and a hint of terror that sent pleasurable excitement thrilling through Pete's blood.

He swam upward, broke the surface, shaking water from his eyes and hair. The air was as easy to breathe as the water. He rode lightly on the rise and fall of smooth waves, looking about him. A forested shore lay half a mile away, across a blue, sunlit sea, and mountains rose behind the dark slopes. The ocean lay empty except for . . . yes, it was there, a clipper ship, sails furled, masts swaying back and forth as the vessel rocked in the trough of the waves. Its clean, sweet lines made Pete's throat ache. He could imagine her under sail, leaning forward into the waves, white canvas straining in great billowing curves, and the sharp bowsprit with its gilded girl's image driving into the spray.

The clipper lay at anchor; he could see the chain. And he could see movement on the deck. Perhaps. . . He swam toward the ship. But the waves were growing troubled. They slapped at him, slapping his cheeks. . . .

"Minho filho! Pedrinho—"

And—"Pedro!" his father's deeper voice rumbled, with worried urgency in it. "Wake up!"

He felt a cool, dry hand laid on his forehead, and something warm and electric seemed to dart through his head. He heard words he did not understand, but they were calling him, summoning—

He opened his eyes and looked up at the little shrunken face of the gipsy, Beatriz Sousa. For a long, long moment her incredibly bright black eyes stared down at him, and the

toothless mouth whispered a word or two more. Then she nodded as though satisfied and drew back, giving Margarida room to fling herself forward and hug Pete's head roughly to her capacious bosom.

"*Ai-i! Pedrinho, coelzinho*, my little rabbit, do you hear me? You are awake now?"

"Sure," Pete said, yawning and blinking as he tried to wriggle free. "What's the matter? Why was the *Senhora Beatriz*—"

The old *gitana* was stuffing strong black tobacco, heavy with perique, into her battered pipe; her eyes were hooded by wrinkled lids. She seemed to have shrunken into a smaller person, now that she was not needed in the house. She did not look up when Manoel gave her a resentful glance and growled, "Your *mae* ran out and got the old woman. I say it is foolishness. Now get up, boy. At once!"

Margarida sidled into the kitchen, pulling Beatriz Sousa with her, whispering to the old woman to ignore Manoel. "He is a good man, *Senhora*, but he thinks a slap will cure all ills."

Under Manoel's baleful and somewhat bleary eye, Pete shucked his pajamas and got into patched underwear and worn denim shirt and trousers. He was hoping Manoel would say nothing. But a calloused hand reached out and gripped his shoulder as he turned to the door. Manoel scowled down into the boy's face.

"It is past noon," he said. "What sort of sleep is this? Your *mae* could not wake you. She came in crying to me, and *I* need my sleep." That was true, Pete thought, examining the telltale symptoms of bloodshot eyes and the circles under them.

"I hope you did not fall into the canal last night, *meu pai*," he said politely.

"That is as may be," Manoel growled. "Now listen to me, *rapaz*. I want you to tell me the truth. Do you know the white powder that *Beberricador* sells at night, by the docks?"

Pete said very firmly, "I have never touched that powder, *meu pai*, or anything else that *Beberricador* sells. Never in my life."

Manoel leaned forward and sniffed doubtfully. "You do not lie often, *Pedro*. Your breath does not smell of wine, either. Perhaps you were simply tired, though—there is something wrong when not even blows will waken a sleeping boy. What am I to think?"

Pete shrugged. He was ravenously hungry and anxious to escape from this inquisition. Besides, what was wrong? He had slept too long; that was all. And Manoel was ill-tempered at being awakened while the clangor of a hangover still beat in his grizzled head.

"Come, *Pedrinho*," Margarida called from the kitchen. Manoel pushed the boy away and Pete, glad to be released, hurried into the next room. He heard his father's body drop heavily on the bed, and knew that within minutes he would be snoring again. He grinned, winked at young Gregorio, and turned toward his mother at the stove.

"*Pedro*—" Beatriz Sousa was beside him, staring very intently into his eyes.

"*Sim, Senhora?*"

"*Pedro*," she whispered, "if you are troubled—come to see me. Remember, I can look through a stone wall farther than most. And don't forget there are many kinds of dreams." Her toothless jaws clamped; she hobbled past him and straight out the doorway, her black skirts whisking. Pete looked after her, baffled. He didn't quite know what to make of Beatriz. All this fuss because he'd overslept. Funny!

"You scared me, Pete," Gregorio said. "I thought you were dead."

"Do not use such words, spawn of the devil," Margarida squealed, spilled stew hissing on the hot stove. "Go and make yourself useful for a change, nasty one. Look, *Cypriano José* is at

the garbage. Pedrinho, eat your stew. It will strengthen you.”

Pete didn't feel particularly weak, but the stew was rich and spicy, and he ate fast. Afterward, remembering the toad, he went out to look in the rock-pile, but it had hidden itself somewhere in the cool, dark recesses and he could not see even a glimmer of the strange, bright, tiny eyes. So he took a home-made rod and headed for the canal.

On the way Bento Barbosa, who was rich and owned ships, waved a sausage of a finger at him and called him a *sonambulo*, so Pete knew that somebody, probably Gregorio, had been gossiping. He made up his mind to clout Gregorio's head later. But Bento Barbosa thought it was a good joke, and he twirled his raven mustachios and sent jovial laughter after Pete's retreating form. “*Mandriao!*” he shouted happily. “*Preguiçoso! Lazybones!*”

Pete wanted to throw a rock at him, but he thought he had better not. Bento Barbosa had ships, and it had been in Pete's mind for some time that he might one day be lucky enough to sail in one of them, Cartagena and Cocos and Clipperton. . . . So he just went on walking through the hot Florida sunshine, his bare feet scuffing up the sandy dust, and thought about the dream he'd had. It was a good dream.

The canal was quiet. While Pete fished he was in a backwater where nobody else existed. He waited for the fish to bite, and wondered when he'd be on a boat, sailing out across the Gulf. Tampico and Juba called him, and he heard the thunder rolling, heavy and ominous, above Paramaribo, where dragons lived. Mailed in shining green and silver they swept in sinuous flight against the blue, their enormous wings darkening the sun, their scaly armor clashing. And Campeche, and the Isle of Pines with its marble temples and its laughing, bearded pirates. Well, and there was Cartagena too, and Cadiz and Cochabambo, and all the enchanted ports. They were real enough to young Pedro Ignacio da Silva Coutinho, and his brown toes wriggled with excitement above the still green water of the canal.

Oh, nothing much happened to Pete that Sunday. He sauntered home in the evening, his head full of shining pictures, and he heard little of the noisy family life boiling around him as he ate his supper.

Out in the stone-pile the toad squatted with its glowing jewel-eyes and, maybe, its memories. I don't know if you'll admit a toad could have memories. But I don't know, either, if you'll admit there was once witchcraft in America. Witchcraft doesn't sound sensible when you think of Pittsburgh and subways and movie houses, but the dark lore didn't start in Pittsburgh or Salem either; it goes away back to dark olive groves in Greece and dim, ancient forests in Brittany and the stone dolmens of Wales. All I'm saying, you understand, is that the toad was there, under its rocks, and inside the shack Pete was stretching on his hard bed like a cat and composing himself to sleep.

And this time the bed began to revolve right away, and spilled him out into darkness. He was expecting it, somehow. He didn't worry about being able to breathe now, he just relaxed and let himself sink, while his eyes accustomed themselves to the green gloom. It wasn't gloom at all, really. There were lights and colors. If it hadn't been for the feel of the water gliding by against his skin he might have imagined himself up in the sky, with meteors and comets blazing past. But these were sea-things, shining in the dark, the luminous life that blazes beneath the southern sea.

First he'd see a tiny twinkling speck, like a star, and it might have been next to his face or a mile away, in that immense, featureless void, with its faint hint of green. It would grow larger. It would turn into a radiant sun of purple or crimson or orange and come rushing at him, and swerve aside at the last moment. There were sinuous ribbons of fire that coiled into

bright patterns, and there were schools of tiny fish that flashed by like sparks. Down below, in the deeper abyss, the colors were paler, and once an enormous shape blundered past down there, like the sea-bottom itself moving heavily. Pete watched awhile and then swam up.

Under a thin new moon the sea lay quivering with silver. Beyond him was the silent isle, and a rakish, sweet silhouette hung at anchor in the lagoon, the Yankee clipper, its bowsprit pointing now at the sky, now at the sea. To and fro it rocked, and Pete, rising and falling upon the same rhythm, was glad that he shared the waves with that lovely shape. Pete knew ships and loved them, and this was a dream of a ship. What he wanted more than anything was to see her under sail, with white canvas straining full of the breeze and a creamy wake parting behind her stern.

He began to swim toward the silent clipper, and he was almost at the anchor chain when a marlin dove up to the surface and tore at him, and a stabbing pain went through his arm. The marlin had a man's face. It was very serious and thoughtful, and it was holding a glass tube tipped with a long sharp needle, and it wasn't a marlin after all. It was old Dr. Manning, come down from his little hilltop house.

There was a strange taste under Pete's tongue. He blinked up at Margarida's worried fat face. "*Minha mae*—" he said, puzzled.

"Thank the good God!" Margarida cried, enfolding Pete in a hysterical hug. "My Pedrinho —*ai-i gracas*—"

"Thank the good *doutor*, rather," Manoel said grumpily, but he too looked troubled. Margarida didn't hear. She was busy smoothing Pete's hair and then mussing it up again, and Pete didn't know what the fuss was all about. Dr. Manning was snapping his black bag shut. He blinked doubtfully at Pete, and then sent Margarida and Manoel out of the room. After that he sat down on the bed and asked Pete questions.

It was always easy to talk to Dr. Manning, and Pete explained about the pirate islands with their magical names, and about the southern sea and the ship. It was a wonderful dream, Pete said, watching the *doutor's* puzzled eyes. He hadn't been taking any drugs, no. Manning was especially inquisitive on that point. Finally he told Pete to stay in bed awhile, and went into the kitchen. Though he kept his voice low out there, Gregorio managed to slide the door open a crack, and Pete could hear what was being said. He didn't understand all of it.

Dr. Manning said he'd thought at first it might be sleeping sickness, or even narcolepsy, whatever that was, but—no, Pete was healthy enough physically. Manoel growled that the boy was bone-lazy, spending his time fishing and reading. Reading! No good could come of such things.

"In a way you're right, Manoel," Dr. Manning said hesitantly. "It's natural for a boy to day-dream now and then, but I think Pedro does it too much. I've let him use my library whenever he wanted, but it seems . . . h'm . . . it seems he reads the wrong things. Fairy tales are very charming, but they don't help a boy to cope with real life."

"*Com certeza*," Manoel agreed. "You mean he has crazy ideas in the head."

"Oh, they're rather nice ideas," Dr. Manning said. "But they're only fairy tales, and they're beginning to seem true to Pete. You see, Manoel, there are really two worlds, the real one, and the one you make up inside your mind. Sometimes a boy—or even a man—gets to like his dream world so much he just forgets about the real one and lives in the one he's made up."

"I know," Manoel said. "I have seen some who do that. It is a bad thing."

“It would be bad for Pete. He’s a very sensitive boy. If you live too much in dreams, you can’t face real life squarely. And Pete will have to work for his living.”

“But he is not sick?” Margarida put in anxiously.

“No. He’s thinking the wrong way, that’s all—for him. He should get out and have more interests, see what the world’s really like. He ought to go to Campeche and Tampico and all these other places he makes up dreams about, and see them as they really are.”

“Ah,” Manoel said. “If he could go out on the boats, perhaps—”

“Something of the sort.” Dr. Manning nodded. “If he could go on the *Princesa*, for instance, tomorrow. She’s bound to Gulf ports, and Pete might ship as a cabin boy or something. The change and contacts would be just what he needs.”

Manoel clapped his hands together. “Bento Barbosa owns part of the *Princesa*. I will talk to him. Perhaps it can be arranged.”

“It would be best for Pete,” Dr. Manning said, and that was the end of the conversation, except that Pete lay quivering with excitement at the prospect of seeing the Gulf ports at last.

He went to sleep again, but he did not dream this time. It was a lighter slumber, and he drowsed for hours, waking once in awhile as voices came to him. Manoel, in the kitchen, was talking angrily, while Margarida tried to quiet him.

Slap! and Gregorio began to wail. “You will keep your tongue still after this!” Manoel shouted. “There is no need to run gossiping down the street. This is a private matter.”

“He is only a *menino*,” Margarida pleaded, but Manoel roared at her angrily.

“His tongue wags night and day! Just now Bento Barbosa asked me what was wrong with Pedro and said he could not send a sick boy on the *Princesa*. I had to talk to him a long time before he would agree to take Pedro. There must be no more of these—these—” Manoel cursed. “It is too hot here in Cabrillo and the air is bad. Once Pedro is out on the water he will freshen up. *Deus*, do you think I would send him away if he were really sick, woman?”

A door slammed and there was silence. Pete dozed again, and remembered Cocos and Cartagena, and the dragons sailing over Paramaribo, and finally he decided he was awake. So he got up, drank the coffee Margarida forced on him, and went out. His arm was still sore from Dr. Manning’s hypodermic needle.

He took a circuitous route to avoid passing Bento Barbosa’s store, and this brought him past the *gitana*’s gate. The old woman called to him, and he couldn’t pretend he hadn’t heard; you couldn’t fool Beatriz Sousa’s sharp black eyes. So he went uneasily into the garden and up to the porch, where the Senhora sat shuffling the tarots on a flimsy table.

“Sit down, Pedro,” she said pointing to the creaky cane chair opposite her. “How are your dreams today, *meus neto*?”

It was funny that she’d never called him grandson before. It was funny, too, that she hadn’t once looked up at him since he’d opened the gate. The wise, bright eyes were focused on the cards as they slapped softly down. Flick—flick—and a nod; flick, flick, and now the silvery head lifted and the bright black eyes looked straight into Pete’s.

“A long time ago I lived in Lisbon,” she said, in softly slurred Portuguese that made the name of the city *Leesh-boa*. “But before that, *meus neto*, my tribe was in the mountains where there are only old things, like the trees and the rocks and the streams. There are truths to be learned from the old things—” She hesitated, and her brown, shrunken claw closed over Pete’s hand. “Do you know the truth, Pedrinho?”

Puzzled, he met her bright stare. “The truth about what, Senhora?”

A moment longer she searched his eyes. Then her hand dropped and she smiled.

“No. Never mind. I see you do not. I had thought perhaps you might need advice from me, but I see you need nothing. You are safe, *menino*. The old magic is not all evil. It may be very bad for men in towns, but a gift is not offered to one who had no use for it.”

Pete did not understand, but he listened politely. “*Sim, Senhora?*”

“You must decide,” she said with a shrug of her narrow shoulders. “You need no help from me or anyone. Only remember this—you have no need to be afraid, Pedro, never at all.” The toothless jaws worked. “No, do not look at the tarots. I will not read your future for you. Your future. . . .” She mumbled something in the gipsy tongue. “Go away now. Go.”

Pete, feeling that he had somehow offended the old woman, got up reluctantly. She did not look after him as he stepped down from the porch.

Even when he got home that evening and found Margarida busy packing the gear that he would need and hovering between pride and tears, he could not quite believe all this was for Pedro Ignacio da Silva Coutinho. Manoel superintended, sitting by the stove and scornfully rejecting dozens of articles his wife wanted to put in the sea-bag. The children were delirious with excitement, and neighbors kept dropping in with good advice. Within an hour Pete had been given twenty assorted crucifixes, charms and amulets, all designed to protect him from the dangers of the sea. Manoel snorted.

“A strong back and a quick eye are better,” he declared.

Margarida threw her apron over her head suddenly and burst into sobs. “He is not well,” she wept. “He will die, I know.”

“You are a fool,” Manoel told her. “The *doutor* said Pedro is healthy as a jackass, and as for you, stop acting like one and bring me more wine.”

As for Pete, he went out into the yard and looked around it with new eyes, now that he was leaving. All the ports of the world lay open to him, Tampico and Campeche and a thousand more, and the pirates were singing on the Isle of Pines, and over Paramaribo the dragons were flying with their mailed and clashing wings.

When Pete went to bed that night he was quite sure he wouldn’t oversleep again. Not with the ports of the world beckoning to him. Through the open window beside him came the faint sound of song and music from the Castle and the other waterfront taverns, the last sounds he would hear from little Cabrillo on the Gulf before he sailed away on the *Princesa* into a beckoning world.

What he’d find there, of course, was up to Pete. But he was sure there were magicians in Tampico and leopard-skins and golden thrones in Juba. Dragons and pirates and white temples where magic dwelt. And best of all, the places he didn’t know about yet, the ones that would come as surprises. Oh, not entirely pleasant surprises. There should be a hint of peril, a touch of terror, to emphasize the brightness of adventure.

Tampico . . . Tampico . . . Juba and Campeche . . . Paramaribo . . . Cocos and Clipperton and Cartagena. . . . They blended into a singing silence in his mind.

In the dark stones the toad sat breathing softly, its eyes looking not at the night, but at something far away.

In a blue brightness Pete went whirling and spinning down, the southern sea taking him eagerly to its depths. Below, the coral blazed with rich colors, and a tiger-shark curved away and was gone.

He swam upward. His head broke the surface and the blue sea lay under a blue sky, cradling the forested isle in the immense plain of waters. Beyond the lagoon lay the clipper

ship. A rattling and a clanking came to Pete's ears. The anchor was rising, white sails mounting on the masts. The wind caught the canvas and billowed them, and the ship heeled over a little as they filled taut and strained against the blue.

The ship was sailing. . .

Sudden desolation struck through Pete. He was afraid, abruptly, of being left alone on this enchanted ocean. He didn't want to watch the clipper dwindle to a speck on the horizon. With desperate haste he began to swim toward the vessel.

In the translucent blue depths beneath him bright shapes moved. A school of dolphins broke the surface with their precise, scalloping play all about him. Showering silver rolled from their sleek hides as they leaped. But ever the rattling of the anchor chain grew louder.

Almost articulate . . . almost understandable . . . altering to a harsh voice that commanded—what?

Waken—waken.

Waken to morning in Cabrillo, Pedrinho; waken to the tide that will take the *Princesa* out across the Gulf. You must go with the tide. You must see Tampico and Campeche. You must look upon the real Tampico, with its black oil-tankers in the oily water. You must see the ports of the world, and find in them what men always find. . . . So waken, Pedro, waken as your father's hand closes on your shoulder and shakes you out of your dream.

Not for you, Pedro.

Out of nowhere, a cool, small, inhuman voice said softly, "A gift is offered, Pedro. The old magic is not all evil. Reach up quickly, Pedro, reach up—"

Pete hesitated. The ports of the world—he knew how wonderful they were to see, and the *Princesa* would be waiting for him. But the chain of the clipper's anchor was almost within reach. He heard the cool little voice, and he gave one more strong stroke in the water and reached up with both hands. The slippery wet surface of the anchor-chain met his dripping palms. He was drawn up out of the sea.

Behind him voices faded. He thought he could hear dimly his mother's cry, and the shrill tones of little Gregorio. But they dwindled and were gone in a new sound from deck, the sound of deep song rising above the shuffle of bare feet.

"As I was a-walkin' down Paradise Street. . ."

Hands were helping him over the rail. He saw grinning sailors pacing around the capstan, bending above the bars, singing and singing. He felt the sun-warmed deck beneath his feet. Overhead canvas creaked and slapped and the ship came alive as wind took hold of the sails and billowed them out proudly, casting sudden translucent shadows over the deck and the grinning men. The clipper's bowsprit dipped once, twice, and spray glittered like diamonds on the gilded figurehead. He heard deep, friendly voices that drowned out the last faint, dying summons from—from—he could not remember.

Thunder rolled deeply. Pete looked up.

Mailed in shining armor, its tremendous wings clashing, a dragon swept through the sunlit air above Paramaribo.

[The end of *Before I Wake* by Henry Kuttner]