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The **POWER AND THE GLORY**

An Amazing Novel
By **HENRY
KUTTNER**

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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The Power and the Glory

By
HENRY KUTTNER

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, December 1947.

The earthly magic Miller sought in the strange fairyland atop an Alaskan peak turned to nothingness in his hands, but his journey brought him a treasure beyond imagining!

CHAPTER I

Transmutation

Carrying the coffee-pot, the Belgian shuffled out of the room. The door thumped behind him. Miller met Slade's inquiring stare and shrugged.

"So he's crazy," Miller said.

Slade drew down the corners of his thin mouth. "Maybe he is. But I've got other sources of information, remember. I'm sure there's—something—up on Peak Seven Hundred. Something plenty valuable. You're going to find it for me." His teeth clicked on the last word.

"Am I?" Miller said sourly.

"Suit yourself. Anytime you feel like it you can go back to the States." There was a threat in the way he said it.

Miller said, "Sure. And then you send a few telegrams . . . It was a sweet little frame you fixed up on me. A murder rap—"

"Well," Slade interrupted, "*that* happened to be a frame. I've got to protect myself, though, in case you ever want to turn State's evidence."

"I've done your dirty work for ten years," Miller growled. "It's too late now to try crossing you up. But we're both guilty of one particular murder, Slade. A guy named Miller who was an honest lawyer, ten years ago. I feel sorry for the poor sucker."

Slade's strong, implacable face turned away from him.

"The man with the gun has the advantage. Up on Peak Seven Hundred there's the biggest gun in the world—I think. Something's sending out terrific power-radiations. I'm no scientist, but I've got men working for me who are. If I can get that—weapon—from the Peak, I can write my own ticket."

Miller looked at him curiously. He had to admit Slade's strength, his powerful will. Head of a slightly criminal and completely unscrupulous political empire for a decade now, Slade was growing restive, reaching out for new worlds to conquer.

Word of this power-source on the peak in Alaska had sounded fantastic even back in the States but it seemed to fascinate Slade, who could afford to indulge his whims. And he could afford to trust Miller—to a certain extent. Miller was in Slade's hands and knew it.

They both looked up as the Belgian came back into the room, carrying a fresh bottle of whiskey. Van Hornung was drunk and well aware of his own drunkenness. He peered at them from under the huge fur cap he wore even indoors.

"*Could man be drunk forever with liquor, love and fights—*" he murmured, hooking out a chair with his foot. "Ah well, it doesn't matter now. Have another drink, gentlemen."

Miller glanced at Slade, then leaned forward across the table.

"About Peak Seven Hundred, now," he said. "I wish you'd—"

The Belgian slapped a fat hand on the table. "You ask me about Seven Hundred. Very well, then—listen. I would not tell you before—I did not wish you to die. Now I am drunker and, I think, wiser. It does not matter whether a man lives or dies.

"For twenty years I have been neither alive nor dead. I have not thought nor felt emotion nor lived like a man. I have eaten and drunk and tried to forget. If you wish to go to the Peak I'll tell you the way. It's all quite futile, you see."

He drank. Miller and Slade exchanged glances in silence.

“If you go,” Van Hornung said, “you will leave your soul behind you—as I did. We are not the dominant race, you see. We try to achieve the summits but we forget that there may already be dwellers on the peaks. Oh yes, I will tell you the way to the Peak if you like. But if you live you will not care about anything any more.”

Miller glanced again at Slade, who gestured impatiently.

“I’ll take a chance on that,” Miller said to the Belgian. “Tell me the way.”

In the dim twilight of the arctic noon Miller followed his Inuit guides up the snowy foothills toward Seven Hundred. For many days they had traveled, deeper and deeper into this dry, sub-zero silence, muffled in snow. The guides were nervous. They knew their arctic gods, animistic, watchful, resented intrusion into sacred areas like Peak Seven Hundred. In their fur-hooded Esquimaux faces oriental eyes watched Miller mistrustfully.

He was carrying his gun now. Two of the Innuits had deserted already, in the depths of the long nights. These two remained and hated him, and went on only because their fear of his gun was greater—so far—than their fear of the gods on Seven Hundred.

The Peak lifted great sheer cliffs almost overhead. There was no visible way of scaling it. But the Innuits were hurrying ahead as if they had already sighted a clearly marked trail. Miller quickened his steps, a vague uneasiness beginning to stir in his mind.

Then the foremost Esquimaux dropped to his knees and began to scabble in the snow. Miller shouted, hearing his own voice come back thin and hollow from the answering peaks. But when he reached the two, one of them looked up over his fur-clad shoulder and smiled a grim smile. In his native tongue he spoke one of the strange compound words that can convey a whole sentence.

“*Ariartokasuaromarotit-tog*,” he said. “Thou too wilt soon go quickly away.” There was threat and warning and satisfaction in the way he said it. His fur mitten patted something in the snow.

Miller bent to look. An iridescent pathway lay there, curving up around a boulder and out of sight, rough crystal surfaces that caught the light with red and blue shadows. Here in the white, silent world of the high peaks it looked very beautiful and strange. Miller knelt and ran a gloved hand over it, feeling even through the leather a slight tingling. . . .

“Erubescite!” he murmured to himself, and smiled. It meant copper, perhaps gold. And it was an old vein. The color spoke of long exposure. There was nothing strange about finding a vein of erubescite in the mountains—the interpenetrating cubes twinned on an octahedral plane were common enough in certain mining regions. Still, the regularity of the thing was odd. And that curious tingling. . . .

It looked like a path.

The Innuits were watching him expectantly. Moving with caution, Miller stepped forward and set his foot on the path. It was uneven, difficult to balance on. He took two or three steps along the iridescent purple slope, and then. . . .

And then he was moving smoothly upward, involuntarily, irresistibly. There was a strange feeling in his feet and up the long muscles at the back of his legs. And the mountain was sliding away below him. Peaks, snow-slopes, fur-clad men all slipped quietly off down the mountainside, while at Miller’s feet a curving ribbon of iridescence lengthened away.

“I’m dreaming!” was his first thought. And his head spun with the strange new motion so that he staggered—and could not fall. That tingling up his legs was more than a nervous reaction, it was a permeation of the tissues.

“Transmutation!” he thought wildly, and clutched in desperation at the slipping fabric of his own reason. “The road’s moving,” he told himself as calmly as he could. “I’m fixed to it somehow. Transmutation? Why did I think of transmutation? I can’t move my feet or legs—they feel like stone—like the substance of the road.”

The changing of one element into another—lead into gold, flesh into stone . . . The Innuits had known. Far away he could see the diminishing dots that were his guides slide around a curve and vanish. He gestured helplessly, finding even his arms growing heavy, as if that strange atomic transmutation were spreading higher and higher through his body.

Powerless, one with the sliding path, he surrendered himself without a struggle to that mounting glide. Something stronger than himself had him in a grip that seemed purposeful. He could only wait and . . . it was growing difficult to think. Perhaps the change was reaching to his brain by now. He couldn’t tell.

He only knew that for a timeless period thereafter he did not think any more about anything. . . .

Thin laughter echoed through his mind. A man’s voice said, “But I am bored, Tsi. Besides, he won’t be hurt—much. Or if he is, what does it matter?”

Miller was floating in a dark void. There was a strangeness about the voice he could not analyze. He heard a woman answer and in her tone was a curious likeness to the man’s.

“Don’t, Brann,” she said. “You can find other—amusements.”

The high laughter came again. “But he’s still new. It should be interesting.”

“Brann, please let him go.”

“Be silent, Tsi. I’m master here. Is he awake yet?”

A pause. “No, not yet. Not for a while yet.”

“I can wait.” The man sighed. “I’ve preparations to make, anyhow. Let’s go, Tsi.”

There was a long, long pause. The voices were still.

Miller knew he was floating in nothingness. He tried to move and could not. Inertia still gripped his body but his brain was free and functioning with a clarity that surprised him. It was almost as if that strange transmutation had changed his very brain-tissues to something new and marvelous.

“Transmutation,” he thought. “Lead into gold—flesh into stone—that’s what I was thinking about when—when I stopped thinking. When that sort of change happens, it means the nuclear charge in the atoms of one substance or the other has to change too. The tingling when I touched the road—was that when it happened?”

But he paused there, knowing there was no answer. For when had a man ever before felt the shifting from flesh to crystal take place in his own body?

If it had happened that way, then it must have been a force like the coulomb forces themselves that welded him into one with the moving road—the all but irresistible forces that hold the electrons in their orbits and rivet all creation into a whole.

And now—what?

“There are two methods of transmutation,” he told himself clearly, lying there in the dark and groping for some answer to the thing that was happening to him.

“Rationalize it,” his mind seemed to say, “or you’ll go mad with sheer uncertainty. Reason it out from what you know. A chemical element is determined by the number of electrons around the nucleus—change that and you change the element. But the nucleus, in turn,

determines by its charge the number of electrons it can control. If the nuclear charge is changed, then this—this crystalline state—is permanent.

“But if it isn’t, then that must mean there’s constant bombardment that knocks off or adds electrons to whatever touches that road. The change wouldn’t be permanent because the original charge of the nucleus remains constant. After awhile the extra electrons would be dropped, or others captured to restore the balance, and I’d be normal again. That must be the way of it,” he told himself, “because Van Hornung came this way. And he went back again—normal. Or was he really normal?”

The question echoed without answer in his brain. Miller lay quiet a moment longer and then began to try once more to stir his inert body. This time, a very little, he felt muscles move. . . .

What seemed a long while later, he found he could open his eyes. Very cautiously he looked around.

CHAPTER II

Tsi

He was alone. He lay on something hard and flat. A dome of crystal arched overhead, not very high, so that he seemed in effect to lie in a box of crystal—a coffin, he thought grimly, and sat up with brittle care. His muscles felt as stiff as if the substance of the iridescent roadway still permeated his flesh.

The dome seemed to have strange properties, for all he saw through it was curiously distorted and colored with such richness it almost hurt the eyes to gaze upon what lay beyond.

He saw columns of golden trees upon which leaves moved and glittered in constantly changing prisms of light. Something like smoke seemed to wreath slowly among the trees, colored incredibly. Seen through the dome about him the color of the smoke was nameless. No man ever saw that hue before nor gave a name to it.

The slab on which he sat was the iridescent purple of the road. If it had carried him here, he saw no obvious way in which it could have left him lying on the crystal coffin. Yet, clearly, this was the end of the moving roadway and, clearly too, the forces which had welded him to it were gone now.

The unstable atoms created in the grip of that strange force had shaken off their abnormality and reverted to their original form. He was himself again but stiff, dizzy and not sure whether he had dreamed the voices. If he had, it was a nightmare. He shivered a little, remembering the thin, inhuman laughter and its promise of dreadful things.

He got up, very cautiously, looking around. As nearly as he could tell through the distorting crystal there was no one near him. The coffin stood in a grove of the golden trees and, except for the mist and the twinkling leaves, nothing moved. He put out a tentative hand to push the crystal up.

His hand went through it. There was a tinkling like high music, ineffably sweet, and the crystal flew into glittering fragments that fell to the ground in a second rain of sound. The beauty of it for a moment was almost pain. He had never heard such music before. It was almost more beautiful than any human being should be allowed to hear, he thought confusedly. There are sensations so keen they can put too great a strain upon human nerves.

Then he stood there unprotected by the dome and looked around him at the trees and the mist and saw that the dome had made no difference. These incredible colors were no distortions—they were real. He took a tentative step and found the grass underfoot so soft that even through his shoe-soles he could feel its caress.

The very air was exquisitely cool and hushed, like the air of a summer dawn, almost liquid in its translucence. Through it the winking of the prism-leaves was so lovely to look at that he turned his eyes away, unable to endure the sight for more than a moment.

This was hallucination. "I'm still somewhere back there in the snow," he thought. "Delirium—that's it. I'm imagining this." But if it were a dream, then Van Hornung had known it too, and men do not dream identical dreams. The Belgian had warned him.

He shook his shoulders impatiently. Even with all this before him he could not quite bring himself to believe Van Hornung's story. There was a quality of dream about this landscape, as if all he saw were not in reality what it seemed, as if this grass of ineffable softness were—and he knew it was—only crusted snow, as if those cliffs he could glimpse among the trees were

really the bare crags of Peak Seven Hundred, and everything else delirium. He felt uneasily that he was really lying somewhere asleep in the snow, and must wake soon, before he froze.

That high, thin laughter rang suddenly through the air. In spite of himself Miller felt his heart lurch and he whirled to face the sound with a feeling of cold terror congealing him. It was odd how frightening the careless voice had been, talking impersonally of its pleasures.

A little group of men and women was coming toward him through the trees. He could not guess which of them had laughed the familiar laughter. They wore brilliantly colored garments of a subtle cut that hung like a toga or a sari, with a wonderful sophistication of line. The colors were incredible.

Miller blinked dazedly, trying in vain to find names for those shimmering hues that seemed to combine known colors into utterly unknown gradations and to draw from the range of colors above and below the spectrum as we see it.

A woman said, "Oh, he's awake," and a man laughed pleasantly and said, "Look how surprised he is!" All of them smiled and turned bright, amused faces to Miller.

He said something—he never remembered what—and stopped in sheer shock at the harsh dissonance of his own voice. It was like an ugly discord tearing through smooth, lilting arpeggios of harmony. The faces of the others went blank briefly, as though they had concentrated on something else to avoid hearing the sound. The woman Miller had first noticed lifted her hand.

"Wait," she said. "Listen to me, for a moment. There is no need to speak—*aloud*." A faint distaste was in her tone. Her . . . tone? That could not be right. No voice was ever so sweetly musical, so gently harmonious.

Miller looked at her. Her face was a small pale triangle, lovely and elfin and strange, with enormous violet eyes and piled masses of hair that seemed to flow in winding strands through one another. Each strand was of a different pastel hue, dusty green or pale amethyst or the yellow of sunshine on a hazy morning. It was so in keeping, somehow, that Miller felt no surprise. That bizarre coiffure fitted perfectly with the woman's face.

He opened his mouth again, but the woman—it shocked him a little, and he wondered that it did not shock him even more—was suddenly beside him. A split-second before she had been ten feet away.

"You have much to learn," she said. "First, though—remember not to speak. It isn't necessary. Simply frame your thoughts. There's a little trick to it. No—keep your mouth closed. Think. Think your question."

Her lips had moved slightly, but merely for emphasis. And surely normal vocal cords could not have been capable of that unearthly sweetness and evenness of tone, with its amazing variations and nuances. Miller thought, "Telepathy. It must be telepathy."

They waited, watching him inquiringly.

The woman said, silently, "Think—*to me*. Frame the thought more carefully. The concepts must be rounded, complete. Later you may use abstracts but you can't do that yet. All I can read is a cloudiness. . . ."

Miller thought carefully, word by word, "Is this telepathy?"

"Still cloudiness," she said. "But it's clearer now. You were never used to clear thinking. Yes, it is telepathy."

"But how can I—where am I? What is this place?"

She smiled at him, and laughter moved through the group. "More slowly. Remember, you have just been born."

“Just—what?”

And thoughts seemed to fly past him like small bright insects, grazing the edges of his consciousness. A half-mocking, friendly thought from one of the men, a casual comment from another.

Brann, Miller thought, remembering. *What about Brann? Where is he?*

There was dead silence. He had never felt such stillness before. It was of the mind, not physical. But he felt communication, super-sensory, rapid and articulate, between the others. Abruptly the rainbow-haired woman took his arm, while the others began to drift off through the prism-leaves and the golden trees.

She pulled him gently away under the tinkling foliage, through the drifts of colored mists. Brushing violet fog before them with her free hand, she said, “We would rather not mention Brann here, if we can avoid it. To speak of him sometimes—brings him. And Brann is in a dangerous mood today.”

Miller looked at her with a frown of concentration. There was so much to ask. In that strange mental tongue that was already coming more easily to him, he said, “I don’t understand any of this. But I know your voice. Or rather, your—I’m not sure what you’d call it.”

“The mental voice, you mean? Yes, you learn to recognize them. It’s easy to imitate an audible voice but the mental one can’t be imitated. It’s part of the person. So you remember hearing my thoughts before? I thought you were asleep.”

“You’re Tsi.”

“Yes,” she said and pushed aside a tinkling screen of the prisms. Before them stood a low rampart of light—or water. Four feet high, it ran like liquid but it glowed like light. Beyond it was blue sky and a sheer, dizzying drop to meadows hundreds of feet below. The whole scene was almost blindingly vivid, every lovely detail standing out sharp and clear and dazzling.

He said, “I don’t understand. There are legends about people up here, but not about—this. This vividness. Who are you? What is this place?”

Tsi smiled at him. There was warmth and compassion in the smile, and she said gently, “This is what your race had once, and lost. We’re very old, but we’ve kept—” Abruptly she paused, her eyes brightening suddenly with a look of terror.

She said. “Hush!” and in the mental command there was a wave of darkness and silence that seemed to blanket his mind. For no reason his heart began to pound with nervous dread. They stood there motionless for an instant, mind locked with mind in a stillness that was more than absence of sound—it was absence of thought. But through the silence Miller caught just the faintest echo of that thin, tittering laugh he had heard before, instinct with cold, merciless amusement.

The prism leaves sang around them with little musical tinklings. From the sunlit void stretching far below bird-song rippled now and then with a sweetness that was almost painful to hear. Then Tsi’s mind relaxed its grip upon Miller’s and she sighed softly.

“It’s all right now. For a moment I thought Brann . . . but no, he’s gone again.”

“Who is Brann?” Miller demanded.

“The lord of this castle. A very strange creature—very terrible when his whims are thwarted. Brann is—he cares for nothing very much. He lives only for pleasure and, because he’s lived so long and exhausted so many pleasures, the devices he uses now are not very—

well, not very pleasant for anyone but Brann. There was a warp in him before his birth, you see. He's not quite—not quite of our breed.”

“He's from the outside world? Human?” As he said it Miller knew certainly that the woman before him was not human, not as he understood the term.

But Tsi shook her head. “Oh, no. He was born here. He's of our breed. But not of our norm. A little above in many ways, a little below in others. *Your* race—” there was faint distaste and pity in the thought, but she let it die there, unelaborated.

“You can't understand yet,” she went on. “Don't try. You see, you suffered a change when you came. You aren't quite as you were before. Were you ever able to communicate telepathically?”

“No, of course not. But I don't feel any different. I—”

“A blind man, given sight, wouldn't realize it until he opened his eyes. And he might be dazzled at first. You're at a disadvantage. I think it would be best for you to get away. Look there, across the valley.”

She lifted an arm to point. Far off across the dazzling meadows hills rose, green in the sunlight, shimmering a little in the warm, clear light. On the height of the highest a diamond glitter caught the sun.

“My sister,” Tsi said, “has that palace over there. I think Orelle would take you in, if only to thwart Brann. You aren't safe here. For your sake, it was a pity the port of entry you reached was here in Brann's castle.”

“There have been others, then?” Miller asked. “A man named Van Hornung—did he come here?”

She shook her head, the rainbow hair catching the sunlight. “Not here. There are many castles in our land and most of them live at peace within and without. But not Brann's.”

“Then why are you here?” Miller asked bluntly.

She smiled an unhappy smile. “Most of us came because we felt as Brann does—we did not care very much any more. We wanted to follow our pleasures, being tired of other pursuits after so many thousands of years. All except me.”

“Thousands of. . . . What do you mean? Why are you here then?”

Her mouth turned down at the corners in a rueful smile.

“Well—perhaps I too was warped before birth. I can't leave Brann now. He needs me. That doesn't matter to you. Brann's dangerous—his heart is set on—on experiments that will need you to complete. We won't talk about that.”

Miller said, “I came here for a purpose.”

“I know. I read part of your mind while you lay asleep. You're hunting for a treasure. We have it. Or perhaps I should say Orelle has it.” The violet eyes darkened. She hesitated.

“Perhaps I'm sending you to Orelle for a purpose,” she said. “You can do me a great service there—and yourself too. That treasure you seek is—should be partly mine. You think of it as a power-source. To me it's a doorway into something better than any of us knows. . . .

“Our father made it, long ago. Orelle has it now, though by rights she and I should share it. If you find a way to get that treasure, my friend, will you bring it to me?”

Long-grooved habit-patterns in Miller's mind made him say automatically, “And if I do?”

She smiled. “If you don't,” she said, “Brann will have you sooner or later. If I can get it I think I can—control Brann. If I can't—well, you will be the first sufferer. I think you know

that. You'll do well to persuade Orelle if you can. Now—I've made a bargain with Brann. Don't ask me what. You may learn, later.

"Go to Orelle, watch your chance and be wary. If you ask for the treasure you'll never get near it. Better not to speak of it but wait and watch. No one can read your mind unless you will it, now that you're learning telepathy, but watch too that you let nothing slip from your thoughts to warn her."

"You want me to take her hospitality and then rob her?"

Distress showed in Tsi's face. "Oh, no! I ask only what's mine, and even that only for long enough to control Brann. Then you may return the treasure to Orelle or strike a bargain with her over it. Five minutes with that in my hands is all I ask! Now here is something I've made for you out of your own possession. Hold out your wrist."

Staring, he obeyed. She unclosed her hand to show him his wristwatch in her palm. Smiling, she buckled the strap around his arm. "It isn't quite as it was. I changed it. If you need me concentrate on this and speak to me in your mind. I'll hear."

There were countless questions still unasked. Miller took a deep breath and began to formulate them in his mind. And then—Tsi vanished! The earth was gone from underfoot and he spun through golden emptiness, dropping, falling. The water-wall hung beneath him. He floated in midair a hundred feet above the crag-bordered stream at the cliffs bottom!

Panic struck him. Then Tsi's reassuring thought said, "You are safe. This is teleportation."

He scarcely heard. An age-old instinctive fear chilled his middle. For a million years men have been afraid of falling. He could not now control that fear.

Slowly he began to drop. He lost sight of Tsi and the golden trees and then of the water-wall.

Under him the stream broadened.

He sank down at an angle—and felt solid ground beneath his feet.

There was silence except for the whispering murmur of the stream.

CHAPTER III

The World That Couldn't Be

Miller sat down on a rock and held his head in his hands. His thoughts were swimming. Cold, fresh air blew against his cheeks and he raised his face to meet that satisfying chill. It seemed to rouse him. He began to realize that he had been half asleep during the interview with Tsi, as though the mists of his slumber had still blanketed his senses. Otherwise he would scarcely have accepted this miraculous business.

Or was there another reason?

He felt a desperate impulse to see Tsi again. She could answer his questions, if she would. And she had been the first friendly face he had seen in this terribly strange land.

He looked up and willed himself to rise.

Impossible, of course. *My own bootstraps*, he thought, with a wild sort of amusement. Were his feet pressing less heavily on the rock beneath him?

And then, from above, came a high, thin laughter that was not truly audible—Brann!

Even before the mental voice came, that malicious, slow thought sent its familiar radiations before it. Something as recognizable as sound or color—more so!—fell down the cliff and crept coldly into Miller's brain. He knew that unheard voice.

"You had better not come up," it said.

Miller stood motionless, waiting. Instinctively he had fallen into the fighter's crouch. But how useless ordinary precautions would be against this super-being!

He tried to close his mind.

"Go to Orelle, then," it said. "I've made my bargain with Tsi and I'll keep it. But she's a fool. She always tries to close her mind to unpleasant things. She'll never really admit we're at war with her sister. As long as she doesn't name it *war*, she thinks it's something else."

Again the high laughter.

"Go to Orelle," Brann said. "I'm winning too easily. Perhaps they can use another fighter. Then they may be able to give me more of a battle. Though, if I chose, I could crush you with a thought—turn the air itself into a weight that would flatten you in an instant. But Orelle may think of a use for you. I can't, except to divert myself with your reactions to certain experiments."

The unheard voice grew carelessly casual.

"Too easy a victory is no victory at all. Go away."

Anger stirred in Miller at that calm assumption of superiority. Brann was thoroughly justified, of course, yet no man likes to be discounted utterly. With all his power Miller willed himself to rise, to float upward as easily as he had floated down—and this time he was certain that his feet lost contact with the earth.

Then a weight like a great stone crushed down on him. Only for an instant did that frightful, unbearable pressure continue, while the veins swelled on Miller's forehead and he heard his breath coming in deep, rasping gasps as he tried to resist the onslaught.

He went to his knees—down till he lay on his back, prostrate, helpless beneath that furious assault of the air itself. A screaming river of wind thundered down and the thin bushes in the gorge stirred and small landslides began as the air-river rushed in hurricane force from above.

Brann laughed idly again and obviously lost interest. The pressure vanished. Sweating, breathing hard, Miller struggled to his feet. He did not try teleportation again. For a moment he stared up at the cliff-rim. Then he turned and began to walk up the gorge in the direction of Orelle's palace. His mouth was thin and his eyes held an angry glow.

So Brann was winning too easily. Well—perhaps something could be done about that!

Far off across the glimmering valley a green hillside rolled high against the sky. The diamond twinkle that was the castle he must reach grew larger as he walked—grew larger with abnormal speed. Miller looked down and was surprised to find that measured by the pebbles and the flowers underfoot he was taking increasingly long steps.

Seven-league boots, he thought, as he found himself striding like a giant through the softness of the grass. The earth slid by beneath his feet with dream-like fluidity. Now the diamond glitter of Orelle's palace was dividing into hundreds of tinier glitters and he saw the walls of pale-colored glass rising fantastically upon the green height of the grass-clad mountain. A palace of glass—or ice.

"Ice," he thought suddenly. "Ice and snow and rocks. That's all there is here. This is a dream. There's no such world—there couldn't be."

And then reason, stirring in his mind, argued, "Why not? How do we know the limits of possibility? Out of the few simple building blocks of the universe—out of neutrons, protons, electrons—everything we know is made. How much else may there be we can't even perceive—unless transmutation takes place and the structure of a man's nuclear patterns change to let him see. . . ."

"After all, you aren't the first. There was Van Hornung and who knows how many before him? There was Tannhauser in the magical mountain of Venusburg—there was Thomas the Rhymer under the hill in fairyland. Paradise itself sounds like a distorted tale of just such a land as this. Legend remembers. You aren't in any new world. You're only exploring a very old one, and—"

Without warning the world dropped away under his feet and all logical progression of thoughts ceased abruptly. The sky was beneath him now and the shining world whirling dizzily over and over around him. But something firmer than gravity clasped him close so that there was no vertigo, even though the earth had forsaken him. Green translucence cradled him. There was a sensation of great speed, and then—

Glass walls flashed past, spun, righted themselves gently. A solid pavement fitted itself against his soles and leveled off to the horizontal. He stood in a small, high room whose walls were row upon row of lenses, like bull's-eye panes, all looking down upon him with—eyes? Black mechanical pupils that moved whenever he moved, following him as he walked toward the nearest wall. For an instant he felt stripped and naked under that multiple scrutiny.

Then a telepathic voice said, "You come from Brann."

Miller looked around wildly. He was alone. Almost automatically he said, "No!" aloud, so that the air shivered to the harsh sound. He wasn't sure why he denied it. Brann had spoken of war.

"Don't lie," the voice said coldly. "I can see the dust of Brann's mountain on you. Do you think we can't identify a simple thing like dust from a given mountain? It streams off you like purple light in the fluorescents. You come from Brann. Are you a spy?"

"Tsi sent me," Miller said. "Take me to Orelle."

“Orelle speaks,” the telepathic voice told him without emotion. “My sister loves me—but Tsi is no woman to trust. No one on Brann’s mountain is worth trusting or he wouldn’t be with Brann at all. What Tsi finds distasteful she denies existence. What do you want here?”

Miller hesitated, glancing around the walls at the impassive, watching eyes of the—machines? Power, he wanted to say. Give me that power-source and I’ll go. But he was silent, remembering Tsi’s warning.

How much of it he could believe he didn’t know now but it was second nature for him to keep his own counsel until he was sure enough to act. Orelle could not read his mind. Tsi had confessed that would be impossible once he began to master telepathic communication. He would be safe enough as long as he could give the right answers.

“I’m from the outside,” he offered hesitantly, thinking that hesitation and uncertainty might be his best defense until he learned more about this place. Exaggerate them, play up even more than was really genuine his bewilderment and confusion. “I—Tsi said you’d help me get oriented here.”

The disembodied voice was silent for a brief, considering moment. Then it said, “I think you lie. However—are you willing to accept our search? Only after you’ve been proved weaponless can we admit you here.”

What could he say but yes? For an instant he remembered the watch Tsi had strapped to his wrist and what she had said of it. But it was for communication only—she had said—and surely she knew that a routine search would probably be made. She wouldn’t have branded him with something that would give him away to the first inspection. Or would she? What he had heard of Tsi did little to increase his confidence in her. Still . . .

“Search if you like,” he said.

The room went dark. Miller, blinking in the sudden blindness, felt something like the vertigo he had not suffered in flight seize him relentlessly now he was on solid flooring. The air spun around him in a shrill diminishing vortex and it seemed to him limitless gulfs were opening underfoot and sucking him down, tight, tight, into a crushing spiral of darkness. . . .

Out of the dark lights suddenly sprang into being, cold, blue lights that struck him like cold water—struck and penetrated. Looking down, he was aghast to see his own blood coursing red through transparent veins, to see his bones stand out cleanly white in their lacings of muscle, moving startlingly when he bent to stare.

The lights went out again. The darkness ceased to whirl. And then for one instant he felt all through his body an indescribable shifting, a terrible motion of inconceivable multiplicity. And in that flash of the instant he was *changed*.

The atoms went back into their normal pattern. That unstable isotope which was himself shed its changed form and he was as he had always been, solid, human, normal.

It was a hideous feeling. Until that moment he had not realized how much he had changed already, what nascent, nameless senses had begun to open up in him, pushing back horizons upon glories beyond glories. It was like deafness and blindness suddenly closing in about a normal man. It was worse—it was like having all the properties of death itself imposed upon the living. Miller held his breath, closed his eyes.

He felt the shift again as the isotope form renewed itself within him. The shifting stirred in the unthinkable myriads of the nuclei that formed him. He was whole again.

Once more the vortex whirled and roared in darkness. Then the dark lifted and he was standing beside a bank of thick yellow flowers under an arched vault of glass. The floor was

tilled in brilliant colors, resilient to the foot. The flowery bank rising from it might be real earth and flowers or it might be a skillful imitation. For it was also a divan.

Orelle lay upon it, smiling at him. He knew it was Orelle. He was aware, though he could not have explained how, of the telepathic emanation from her mind to his, individual as the pattern of the brain. She was beautiful—as everyone in this world seemed beautiful.

He saw something of Tsi's features in hers but she was not dressed with the extravagance her sister affected. She was very slender, and her graceful body was sheathed tightly in something like clear satin that covered her to the wrists and ankles and flowed in long smooth lines over the flowers she lay on. She was pulling them idly and twirling the blossoms between her fingers.

"Well, you are welcome," she said, almost reluctantly, eyeing Miller with a smile that had wryness in it. "We found no weapons, though we searched you down to the very structure of the protons. To tell you the truth, we have no reason to trust you.

"But Tsi must have had some reason for sending you here and I think we're safer coping with her schemes at first hand than goading her on to try something more subtle still. Be sure you're watched, my friend. Be careful what you do."

Miller said wryly, "I'm not likely to do anything. From what I've seen of this place, I feel helpless. Do you all have the same powers as Tsi? How many of you are there? And what—"

Orelle shrugged. "We're not used to hurry. Of course we have all the time we need. Your race doesn't—even here. I can see your curiosity. And I'll satisfy it, too. Yes, everyone here has the same powers, though naturally some are stronger than others. There is the telepathic factor, and—other things."

"Bred into your race? But what about me? I'm not your kind."

She said slowly, "A million years ago your ancestors were, though. Since then your people have gone down. It took eons to reach the peak when Atlantis and Mu were great cultures, and it will take eons more for your race to regain what they have lost. Only here, on this secret mountain, have we retained the strength of the old civilizations."

Miller said. "But what happened?"

"Oh, the usual thing. Men took weapons they weren't ready to use. In that time—try to understand this—the atomic structure of the world itself was different. You know that? That the atom can change—"

"I do indeed," Miller told her grimly. "If electrons change, or if the nucleus changes, the structure changes too."

She said, "Well, that was what happened. All earth is dull and dead now. Only here does the old special type of matter still exist. It throws off a certain radiation that makes it possible for us to be born and live as we are. In Atlantis there was experiment with nuclear structures, and transmutation."

"We have atomic power now," Miller said.

"The beginnings of it. You're merely beginning. It will be a long, long time before you stand where Atlantis once stood. First you must change the very structure of your world! Only then will *you* change, will the radiation-caused mutation alter you and give you the powers and senses you lost when a world went to war a millennium ago.

"The fires of matter itself moved across the planet, and where it passed, structure altered and what was bright and shining and glorious became a dull, empty thing. Men lost their specialized, hard-won powers then. But the seeds remain latent in their bodies, recessive

characteristics. Here, on the mountain, the recessive can become dominant for a little while. It is unstable, of course. . . .”

“Then—I’m like you? Tsi told me but I couldn’t believe it. I’m a—a sort of superman?”

“Every gift has its price,” she said oddly. “There is beauty here but there is terror too. You must have noticed that you see with clearer eyes—the eyes of the mind.”

“Yes,” he said. “I’ve noticed that. Things are—shining, somehow.”

“It would be well if you remembered your own world,” Orelle said, after a little pause. Her eyes were troubled. “Your own atomic structure has altered but that can take place only once.”

A man came into view through a glassy wall that melted at his approach, and solidified again behind him. He looked no older than Orelle, a firm-fleshed, smiling man whose vari-tinted hair lay smoothly across his scalp. But his eyes were old, grey and cloudy with the mists of incalculable centuries.

CHAPTER IV

The Bomb

“Orelle—” he began. And then the aeon-misted eyes fell upon Miller, and a look of bewildered recognition seemed to grow in them. “This man,” he said uncertainly. “Should I know him, Orelle? Has he been here before, or. . . .” Suddenly the mists cleared from his eyes and he looked old no longer but resolute and certain.

“I know him!” he said in a crisp voice. “His face was in the Time Pool. It meant danger. But the likelihood was so remote that—well, I dismissed it. I didn’t believe.”

“What was the danger?” Orelle leaned forward anxiously, her satin skirts moving with a gentle rustle over the flowery bank where she sat.

The man shook his head. “You’ve seen the Time Pool, child. There are so many possibilities of the future—who can say in what ripple this man’s face floated for a moment before the bubble burst? But it was danger. I remember that.”

They turned in one motion and looked at Miller with wise, wary, thoughtful eyes, astonishingly alike in the two faces. He realized they must be closely akin, and both akin to Tsi, whom no one trusted far.

He said quickly, “If you can read the future you must know I’m not a man to break my promises—and I swear to you both I mean no harm.”

The man made an impatient gesture. “The future is never that clear. There is no ‘must’ in time—only ‘perhaps’.”

“Tsi sent him,” Orelle said. “She must have had her reasons.”

“She sent me because of Brann,” Miller declared. The two nodded.

Orelle said, “Well, sometimes she’s moved to save one of Brann’s victims. Sometimes I think she helps him in his—call them experiments—on those he captures. She’d like us to think only whims move her. But we know the thing that lies behind all she does. Llesi and I—we know.” She smiled grimly at the man beside her.

“She wants the Power,” the man called Llesi said.

Miller thought to himself, “So do I,” but aloud he said only, “The Power?” in a voice of innocent inquiry.

Llesi nodded, his eyes fixed speculatively upon Miller as if he gazed through the mists of incalculable years.

“A toy my brother and I once made that became far more than a toy before we were finished. Now Tsi claims her share in her father’s treasure. These two are my brother’s children but sometimes I think Tsi has no blood of mine in her veins.”

Orelle said, “No, Llesi, she’s only weak. If Brann didn’t rule her so completely—”

“She’d be welcome to her heritage. But we know that to give her what she asks is to give it straight into Brann’s hands. And there’d be an end to this castle and all who live here.”

“Who is Brann?” Miller asked impatiently. “I’ve heard so much about him, I’ve even heard him speak. But I’ve never seen him. What does he look like?”

Orelle shook her head. Small bells she wore in her ears tinkled at the motion, and even the tiny sounds they made were vividly beautiful to Miller’s increasingly keen new senses.

She said, “No one has seen him except Tsi. No one but she can tell you what he is. He receives his friends only in the dark or from behind curtains. Ever since he built that castle,

centuries ago, he's kept his secret hidden—whatever it may be. I should like to see him dead.”

She said it without passion. “Brann is true evil, perhaps pure evil in its most flawless form. He's very wise and very powerful. I'm not sure why he chose us for his enemy but I only know now we must fight or be killed.”

Miller made up his mind suddenly. “As I left his castle,” he said, “Brann spoke to me from beyond the wall. He said this was a fight he would win too easily. He told me to come to you as another fighter, to make the battle more interesting.”

Orelle leaned forward quickly on the flowery bank, her earrings tinkling musically. “He said that? You know, I'd have guessed the opposite.

“I'd have said Tsi sent you here knowing Brann would covet you for his experiments—knowing that with you here, he'd redouble his efforts to conquer us and drag you back. If his interest were flagging, that might be the best way to revive it against us and force her entry here. Because she'd do anything in the world to get her hands on the Power.”

Llesi interrupted her in a thoughtful voice. “She might send an envoy here armed with some secret weapon Brann could devise—something that could pass even our careful searching. Remember, Orelle, I've seen this man before in the Time Pool—this man's face, and danger!”

“I've given you my word I didn't come to harm you,” Miller said, realizing that though he sailed close to the wind of truth in saying that, at least it was accurate as far as it went. “Still, I'd like to know more about this Power. Unless you—”

He never finished. For suddenly there was a blast of appalling sound in the room, and a rush of white-hot fire that seemed to flow down his arm and burst in a blinding gush from his wrist.

When he could see again, what he saw was stunning. For Llesi was collapsing where he stood, his knees buckling, his face strangely drained and empty as if he were dead before he struck the floor. There was a curious shimmering glow bathing him, sinking inward like a devouring acid.

Orelle was on her feet, stumbling forward, and from all around figures were closing in through the glass that melted at their approach.

Blinded and deafened by a sound that he knew was not truly audible, Miller tried to spring back.

He could not move. The white dazzling flame still poured from him upon the falling Llesi. Louder and louder that unheard, cataclysmic shout roared through the room. Now Miller felt energy of some strange sort pouring from Orelle and the others—mental power, a silent, tremendous flood that beat upon the white flame and—snuffed it like a candle.

The fire was gone. But Llesi had fallen.

A dozen men and women had crowded into the room by now, bright in their sleek rainbow garments. Two men fell to their knees beside Llesi.

Orelle had swung toward Miller. Hot rage blazed tangibly from her—tangibly, for Miller's mind winced beneath that telepathic red fury. Through the scarlet twisted a black thread—the thought and intention of death, cold black against crimson.

“Orelle!” he cried desperately. “I didn't—it was some trick!”

He could not speak, even telepathically. For he could see nothing now but Orelle's dark eyes, and they were expanding, growing into luminous pools that chilled him, and effectively paralyzed muscle and nerve and mind.

Eerily a thought that was not his own moved suddenly in his frozen brain—moved and reached out toward Orelle.

“Wait, child, wait!” the thought said. *“This is Llesi speaking.”*

All must have heard it, for every head in the room turned sharply. The blinding pools that were Orelle’s eyes began to fade and dimly Miller could see again. In his mind that voice of another brain said, *“The bracelet on his wrist—take it!”*

No one stood near Miller but he felt a violent tug at his wristwatch, saw it torn free. It sprang through the air to Orelle as if thrown by an invisible hand. She spread her fingers and received it. But she was looking at Miller.

“Llesi?” she said uncertainly, still staring into Miller’s eyes. “Llesi—you hear me?”

“Yes. Wait. I must speak with this man . . . Miller . . . wait.”

Orelle gestured. Llesi’s body was lifted without support and floated toward the bowery couch. It sank down gently. One of the men came forward and made a quick examination.

“He isn’t dead. It’s stasis, of a sort. But I can’t communicate with him. Try it, Orelle.”

“Llesi?” Orelle’s thought arrowed out. *“Llesi?”*

Miller roused from his stupefied amazement. That fantastic voice in his brain was speaking quietly to himself alone.

“Don’t fight me. They’ll kill you unless you obey me. Empty your mind, Miller. Let me speak through you. Now. . . .”

Miller listened to the thought that was not his, riding on the waves of his own telepathic mind, speaking to Orelle and the others. But he believed it spoke to himself as well.

“This must be Brann’s doing,” Llesi said. “The bracelet—when I guessed at a weapon the man Miller could have brought Tsi must somehow have been listening. Even our tests failed to find it but a weapon that bracelet must have been. Well, Brann failed but only thanks to you for smothering the weapon so soon. I’m not destroyed but I think it may be a long while before I can think or move in my own body.”

“But you can hear us, Llesi?” Orelle’s voice was soft.

“Through this man—yes. This is a telepathic rapport with him. There must have been electronic contact at the crucial moment. Without Miller I would be cut off completely until my body mends again. I think it will in time. I know the sort of weapon Brann used. My body will have to absorb vital energy, to overcome the insulation of atomic stasis the weapon threw about me.

“Now listen, because my strength is going. The mental must draw on the physical and my body’s an ember now. I must sleep and gather power. Brann will know what’s happened here—depend on it, he’ll strike while I’m still helpless. I must think—and rest.”

Orelle said, “We can handle Brann!”

“We can handle him if I can lead you. Otherwise. . . Take no risks. Remember, my only contact with you is through this man Miller. Brann will destroy him if he can. But the sword is two-edged. Through Miller I can fight if I must. Now let me rest. I must gather my strength, and think.”

The thought trembled on the air—faded—and was gone into an enormous stillness. Miller was alone again in his own brain.

Orelle stared at him, anger still bright in her mind but leashed anger now.

“How much of this have you passed on to Brann already?” she demanded.

Miller said, “I swear I didn’t know I was carrying a time-bomb like that. Tsi told me it was only a communication device she’d built into my watch. I can only say I’ll help you fight Brann in any way I can.”

Orelle came forward with quick steps, her satin robes rustling, and took Miller’s shoulders in a tight grip, reaching high with both hands to do so. Her eyes were close to his. She stared compellingly up at him and he felt the warm force of her mind probing his with angry emphasis.

“Tell me one thing—the truth,” she demanded. “*Are you Brann?*”

CHAPTER V

The Signal

The stars were glittering rayed circles of colored fire in the night sky. Miller lay staring for what seemed a long while, wondering vaguely what had wakened him. The wall before his bed was clear glass through which the night sky seemed to look in at him with its countless silver eyes. He had never seen the stars before, he knew now.

With his other eyes, they had been only dots of brilliance, without pattern. Now he could see that there was indeed a pattern to their arrangement—one too vast for even his augmented mind to grasp but something he could recognize as being there, even though it lay outside the range of human understanding.

He could see colors change and glitter in the discs of light that had been only points without dimension to his old sight. He could even make out dimly the shapes of continents on one or two of the planets. And there was a strange, distant, ringing music, almost inaudible, circling through the dark vault above.

He knew now that it was no legend which told of the music of the spheres and the stars that sang together. Light-waves and sound-waves blended into a melody that was neither one nor the other, neither sight nor sound, but a beautiful medley of both.

“Men in the old days must have heard it,” he thought to himself, half-asleep. “Maybe in ancient times they were still close enough to—*this* state—to catch the echoes of the old music. . . .”

Deep in the center of his drowsing mind a thought stirred that was not his own. “*Miller, Miller, are you awake?*”

He framed the answer with an eerie feeling of double-mindedness. “Yes, Llesi. What is it?”

“I want to talk to you. I’ve gathered enough strength now to last me awhile. What’s been happening? Are you safe?”

Miller let a ripple of amusement run through his mind. “Thanks to you. Can you tell from my thoughts that I didn’t know what I was bringing into your castle? I didn’t mean to attack you.”

“I believe that—with reservations. Does Orelle?”

“She thought I was Brann. She may still think so though I hope I’ve convinced her.”

“I can’t read your mind. But I must trust you—no more than I can avoid! Get up, Miller, and look toward Brann’s castle. I have a feeling of danger. I think that was what roused me. Something evil is coming our way.”

Conscious of a slight chill at the gravity with which Llesi spoke, Miller rose. The floor was ineffably soft to his bare feet. He stepped out into the little glass bay that formed one side of the room. From there he could look down over the valley he had traversed that day. Far off lights glimmered at the height of a sheer cliff—Brann’s castle.

“Why—I can see in the dark!” he exclaimed in surprise, staring out at the soft, dim landscape that seemed to be lit by a soil of invisible starshine so that details were delicately visible as they had never been before.

“Yes, yes,” Llesi’s mental voice said impatiently. “Turn your eyes to the left—I want to see that wall of the valley. There—now right. . . .”

The commands, couched in mental terms that took only a flashing fraction of the time words would have taken were almost like reflex commands from Miller's own brain.

"I think you'd better dress and go down to the Time Pool," Llesi said at last. Miller could feel the profound uneasiness stirring in the disembodied mind that his own brain housed. "Hurry. There's no guessing what unnatural thing Brann may have shaped to attack us. He wants you, Miller. Your coming brought our war to a climax and I know now he won't stop until he gets you—or dies. It depends on you and me which thing happens."

There was a guard at Miller's door—or the glass wall that melted like a door when he approached it. Llesi's mental voice spoke and the guard nodded and followed down the long sloping ramp of the glass castle, through great, dim, echoing rooms, along corridors behind which the people of Orelle's dwelling slept.

They came out at last into a garden in the heart of the castle. Circled by glass walls, it lay dim and fragrant around the broad shallow pool in its center. Starlight shimmered in changing patterns on the water that rippled slightly in the wind.

Miller found himself glancing up toward the wall-top without being sure whether the impulse was his own or Llesi's. In a moment he knew, for there was a whispering rush and in obedience to some command from his own brain—and from Llesi's—a domed roof of glass moved across the garden, closing it in.

Now the starlight fell in prismatic rays through the dome. It struck the pool in somehow focused patterns and the water seemed to respond to that unimaginably light pressure.

Circles formed where the rays struck, formed and spread outward in interlocking rings that seemed to gather momentum instead of losing it, so that they were seething together in a very short time, breaking over one another in tiny waves, tossing up bubbles and foam. The pool boiled in the cool starlight.

And among the boiling rings there were reflections. Pictures moved chaotically through one another, so rapidly and so bewilderingly that Miller grew dizzy as he watched. Once he thought he saw Tsi's face with the rainbow hair disordered, streaming in the wind.

Once he had a glimpse of himself, seen confusingly from the back, struggling against something that seemed to tower and stoop above him but the vision rolled under again before he could focus on it and the faces of strangers floated among bubbles to replace it.

"Is it real?" he asked Llesi inaudibly. "Is this the future?"

There was an impatient movement in his own mind. Llesi, who had been studying the pictures in the profoundest silence, said, "No—yes—partly. These are the likeliest futures. No one understands fully, but the theory is that somewhere in hyperspace all possible futures work themselves out from any given point.

"And the light-rays—the pictures of all that happens—move on out into space endlessly. When the glass dome is closed starlight, falling through the moving rays, projects these pictures back into the pool for anyone to read who knows how. Men from time everlasting have tried to read the future in the stars but you can see from this how difficult it is and how unreliable even a trained mind can be when it has only this to work from.

"One decision may alter all probable futures. And those are unstable, shifting and changing—no man can know the future with any certainty. But it's possible to see dangers, sometimes, and prepare for them—though that may mean facing a worse peril later on. Wait —"

In the pool a ripple took form at the impact of a reflection and began to spread. It showed the picture of a shifting, cloudy mass moving against the translucent water—but moving with a directive purpose, Miller thought. The background took form. He saw himself and Orelle in miniature with the cloud no longer shifting but swooping purposively above them.

Another ripple collided violently with the first and the picture vanished in a burst of bubbles. But it took shape again in the next moment, though different now, with a shift in background. The ripples raced over that image and washed it out with another, like a not-quite-identical copy. Then he saw the castle in which he stood and it was, he thought, collapsing into ruins.

That changed. He saw himself in tiny reflections, facing Tsi— And then a ripple washed across the pool in which he saw his own face and Slade's and there was something inexplicably terrible about both.

Shaken, he asked Llesi a mental question. Llesi answered him briefly.

"If part of what you just saw happens, other parts can't happen. But you saw that cloudy pillar? It appeared too often against too many backgrounds to be very far off in space or time. Brann is sending a warrior against us. Not a human warrior. I think we can expect the cloudy thing we saw quite soon, in one or another of the versions we've been watching."

"But what is it?"

"I don't know. Something dangerous—that much you can be sure of. I think we can defeat it, once we discover what it is. So far we've always been able to defeat Brann's warriors, no matter what form they had."

"So far?" Miller asked. "And then someday—what?"

Mentally Llesi shrugged. "Who knows? I, who read the future, realize better than most men that I have no way of guessing what is to come. I can see the possibilities here in the pool, I can foresee the worst dangers and prepare against them—but beyond that I can't go. No. I don't know what the outcome will be between Brann and me."

Miller said with abrupt decision, "You've looked too long in the Time Pool! You've been depending on what you see there to tell you what to do. Why not take the future into your own hands?"

There was a curious stillness in his brain at that, as if Llesi were suddenly wary and watchful. Finally the voice that shared his mind spoke cautiously.

"What do you suggest?"

"Someday, if I understand you, Brann may succeed at last in creating a kind of warrior you can't overcome. I saw this castle falling in one of those pictures in the pool, so I know it's possible—no, even probable, that this thing he's sending, or maybe the one after it, will be the one to destroy you. Is that right?"

Still caution and distrust ruled Llesi's mind, but there was reluctant interest in the mental voice that said, "Go on. What are you thinking about?"

"Brann wants one thing—the Power. Is that right?"

"The Power and yourself, now. Yes," Llesi answered.

"So he'll keep on attacking until he gets one or both. Why haven't you attacked him first?"

"Do you think we haven't tried? Brann's castle is invulnerable. We've failed and failed and failed again to force any entry by any means we know. But Brann's failed, too, against us. It's stalemate."

"It needn't be. I have an idea." Miller hesitated. "I won't tell you now. You wouldn't accept it. Later on, if things go wrong, maybe you'll be willing to listen. Maybe—"

From across the Time Pool, in the dimness of the garden, Orelle's mental voice said clearly, "Don't go on, Miller. Or are you really Brann?"

Miller had the curious sensation in his brain that both he and Llesi had actually moved in the center of his skull, as he spun toward the dark tree where she stood watching.

"How long have you been here, child?" Llesi said.

"Long enough. I saw the cloudy thing coming in the Pool. I know what we've got to face—but not with treachery to make it even worse than it is. Oh, Llesi, won't you let me kill him?"

"Not yet," Llesi said with a deadly sort of practicality. "Not yet, because you need me in the fight, and I'm helpless without this man. Nor am I wholly sure he can't be trusted, Orelle."

"I heard what he was trying to suggest. Something treacherous—some way to help Brann win at last. Llesi, I'm afraid! This isn't safe. I—"

A flash of soundless white light without warning illumined the garden and the whole castle around it, so that every figure stood out in abrupt silhouette against the whiteness. As suddenly as it came, it went out, leaving momentary blindness behind it.

Orelle caught her breath and said, "The signal! Llesi—hurry! Whatever it is, it must be almost here!"

CHAPTER VI

Invasion

They saw it first far off on the plain, moving toward them through the clear darkness. At first it seemed only a mist that drifted with the wind but, when the wind shifted, the grey fog came on. Its heart was thicker and dimly the eye could glimpse intricate matrices of light far inside the cloud, glittering patterns like diamond cobwebs arranged in lattice formations.

Miller and Orelle, with Llesi a bodiless awareness beside them, stood at a glass wall looking out over the plain toward Brann's castle.

Llesi breathed softly. "I know that pattern. It's a bad one. The thing's brain and control and energy-source are in the bright matrix you see. Watch now."

The lattices shifted into new geometric formations and out of the cloud rippling, soft grey tentacles thrust, thickening as they moved.

"That would be stronger than iron once it took shape," Llesi was saying. "The pseudopod principle, of course. It will be a hard thing to fight."

They stood watching in silence while the grey cloud flowed forward with increasing speed until it was nearly within reaching distance of the castle. Far off, across the valley, the lights of Brann's walls watched like eyes. Miller spoke impatiently.

"Aren't you going to do anything? Can't you stop the thing?"

"I could. But I want to see what new ideas Brann has incorporated into this. It's better to know than to guess. If I destroy this he'll just send another. I'm going to let it try the gate."

The cloud flowed up to the outer wall. . . paused . . . seemed to be considering the massive glass barrier before it. Then the lattices rearranged, glittering. A finger of greyness reached out, seeped through the crack between gate and wall.

Metal groaned in the quiet of the night. That tiny pseudopod was expanding with monstrous force. The gate shivered, crumpled—gave way.

Radiant shimmers of color flared down from the walls upon the cloudy thing as Llesi's batteries went into action at last. In his own brain Miller could feel Llesi's tense watchfulness as he waited to see how the creature would meet them.

Its lattice-work heart shifted like a kaleidoscope. The clouds thickened, grew dark. It shrank—expanded again—and moved on into the castle, a wreathed thing of velvety blackness that swallowed up the attacking lights and ignored them.

Now they lost sight of it but they could hear, partly through the vibrations of the castle walls themselves and partly through the confused mental cries of the people below them, the progress the machine was making. A transparent wall gave way before it and the crash of the collapse sent a terrible, ringing music all through the castle. There was the silent voiceless cry of a man caught in its unimaginable grip—a cry that shivered up to an unbearable peak in the brains of all who heard, and then went silent with a suddenness that made the listeners reel.

Orelle seized Miller's arm in a tight grip. "Come with me," she said. "Hurry!"

She was half-running as she led the way through the dark castle which was yet so clearly visible to the sight. The confusing halls were strange to him but before they reached their goal Miller was leading the way, Llesi in his brain sending out the mental orders that guided him, so that the corridors and doors and sloping glass ramps seemed to swing around and to fly open before him without the need of knowledge on his part.

There was pandemonium below. Miller could feel the tension in Llesi's mind and in Orelle's as they raced toward the breached wall of their fortress. Llesi was unsure.

"Maybe this is the one," he said, half to himself, as the translucent walls spun past. "Maybe this one we can't fight."

More than one wall had been breached by the time they reached the scene of the fight. The castle was filled with the jangling, musical crashes of shattered glass and the cries—some of them vocal cries now—of the defenders. But from the attacking machine itself no sound came.

Miller saw it through jagged walls and over the heads of the castle's men—a great coagulated cloud, velvet-soft and iron-hard, the colored lights of the defenders' strange weapons beating upon it in vain. There were colors in the weapons such as Miller had never seen.

"Photon showers," Llesi told him briefly. "Very high-frequency light waves with an energy increase great enough to utilize the mass of the light. Those latticed patterns would be smashed by the impact—if we could reach them.

"When you deal with anything as delicate as this you need a delicate weapon. The lattices would be impervious to heavy weapons but the mass of light itself could crush the patterns if I had some way to penetrate the cloud."

"The photons should do it," Orelle said in a worried voice. "Always before—"

"Brann has something new this time."

The cloud rolled on. Through the shattered walls they saw it engulf the men in its path, moving like a velvet-soft juggernaut that crushed all before it. It pressed its misty surface against another wall—there was a surging all through the mass and, briefly, a pattern of clouded lights glimmered deep in the smoky bulk.

The castle rang with the jangled music of another falling wall.

"It's making straight for the Power," Orelle said, quietly now. "Llesi, you've got to stop it."

Miller felt in his own brain Llesi's rapid, orderly thoughts, marshalling the facts and measuring against them his varied resources. Then, decisively, he spoke.

"We must get to the Power first. I can stop it but we'll have to hurry."

To Miller it seemed as if the castle spun around him again as, in obedience to the orders in his brain, he whirled and ran with Orelle at his heels. The corridors opened up before them, unfamiliar pathways looking strangely familiar to the double vision in his mind. Another wall smashed into ringing fragments behind them as they ran.

With his new night-sight Miller could see a long way through the translucent walls of the glass castle. Lights had been kindled through the building now so that the glimmers, far and near, reflecting beyond intervening barriers, made the whole castle glow bewilderingly.

But ahead of them, growing larger as they neared, was one part of the building that even this new sight could not penetrate. It was a great cube whose walls gave back the vision opaquely, as it loomed before them.

Orelle pushed past him as they reached it, spread both hands flat upon the dark surface. It parted before her, melting away as the other walls melted to admit entry, and she pressed through into the hidden room. Miller followed her, his brain spinning with his own curiosity and the complicated planning of Llesi who shared it.

Afterward Miller could never remember clearly what he had seen in that great dark room. He had only an impression in retrospect of an immense number of delicate shining things that

might have been instruments—of countless rows of containers over which light seemed to ripple and play from within the colored holders, like votive lights seen far off down the aisle of a cathedral—of things without name or recognizable shape. . . .

In the center of the room, hanging in the heart of a filligreed framework which it did not seem to touch anywhere, a clear transparent cube three feet through floated free. Within it a tilted halo of—of stars?—rotated slowly through the solid substance of the block. And very faintly, Miller thought he could hear music as it turned, the same music he had caught from the night sky, subsonic but still perceptible to his new senses.

“The Power,” Orelle said, nodding toward the cube.

Miller went forward slowly until he stood by the delicate framework within which the block floated. He could feel a slight pressure constantly beating out from the rotating stars, and at the same time a slight equal suction—an impossible sort of double force that did not equalize itself but kept him in a continual state of muscular readjustment to balance the opposite pulls while he stood within its range.

He was trying to control the excitement that poured through him at his nearness to this unimaginable thing he had come so far to find. Slade would give all he had to possess it for, inexplicable as it was, there was a harnessed power in the mysterious thing unlike any power at man’s disposal in the lower world beyond Peak Seven Hundred.

Then, in his brain, Llesi said impatiently, “Later you can examine it. I need you now, if we’re going to stop Brann’s beast. Turn around—go to the far wall, reach up to that container of blue light and. . . .”

Miller’s conscious mind ceased to make sense out of the orders Llesi gave it but his body was obedient. He did not try to resist. He relaxed his own will and allowed Llesi full control, so that he was only dimly aware of what his body did in the next few minutes. His hands were busy, and there was an intense, quiet activity in his mind.

An activity that gradually began to slow. Lights swelled and sank beneath his busy fingers. Heat and cold and other stranger sensations he could not name bathed his hands and arms, beat against his intent face bent above them. But into his mind slowly a sense of frustration crept.

He made an effort to bring his own mind back into focus and asked Llesi a quick mental question.

“I don’t know,” Llesi’s mind replied. “It isn’t easy. I think I can stop the thing but at a cost we can scarcely afford. And I could only do it once. Brann will know that. He’ll have only to send another just like it and—” The thought blanked out as if even in his subconsciousness Llesi did not want to shape the end of that idea.

Miller put forth greater effort and shrugged off the inertia of his mind which had been necessary while Llesi worked. He was keenly alert now. He had a job to do.

“Will you listen to me?” he asked. “I think I’ve got an answer—if you’ll trust me.”

Llesi’s reply was wary but there was eagerness in it too. “What do you want us to do?”

“Tell me first—can you duplicate this Power source?”

With a double accord both Llesi and Miller turned to gaze at the floating cube with its lazily rotating halo of glittering light.

“I can, yes,” Llesi said. “Why?”

“Easily? Soon?”

“Not in time to stop Brann’s creature, no. It would take several hours.”

“Then,” Miller said, bracing himself for the storm he knew must follow his suggestion, “then I think you’ll have to let the thing downstairs take your Power and carry it back to Brann.”

There was a mental explosion of fury and refusal.

After it had died down, while Orelle still gazed at him with burning dark eyes full of distrust and hatred, and Llesi still smouldered angry thoughts in his brain, Miller went on.

“I know—I know. In your place I’d feel the same. But look at it dispassionately if you can. Brann has you where he wants you now. You can only drive off this mechanism downstairs once and Brann can send another to take the Power source anyhow. If you stay passive you’re beaten. But listen to me—and maybe you can still win. Attack! Let the Power go—but follow it.”

There was silence for a moment, while the two others digested this idea. Then Orelle said, “We could only follow to Brann’s walls. We’ve never been able to get into his castle and—”

“Don’t you see, this is the only way! He’ll have to make room for the cube of the Power to enter. If we follow, there ought to be a way for us to force an entry too. Especially if he doesn’t suspect. Oh, I know—you think I *am* Brann. I wish there were some way to—wait! Could you read my mind if I opened it to you? Would you believe me then?”

Slowly Orelle said, “I think it might be possible. Are you willing to let me try?”

Miller hesitated for a moment. There is a curious reluctance in the human mind to strip aside the last dark barrier that separates each individual from the world he lives in. The privacy of the mind is so jealously guarded a secret that not even if a man wills it can he wholly bare his thoughts to another. But unless Miller let Orelle into those innermost chambers there was little hope of success for any of them.

“If I don’t,” he thought, “Brann will win, in the end. And if he wins—well, I have more to lose than anyone here.” Aloud, in his mental voice, he said to Orelle, “Yes—try if you’re able.”

She smiled a little. “Let your mind go blank. Don’t offer any resistance—no, none at all—you *are* resisting me, Miller. Let me have the truth. Brann—Brann . . . are you Brann? I must know. . . .”

Her eyes held his and, as they had done once before, began to grow larger and larger until they blotted out the room and were a dark pool in which his consciousness was sinking. . . .

“Thank you,” Orelle said quietly. “I’m sorry. You were telling me the truth all along—unless you’re more cunning than I think you are and know how to hide your secrets even deeper than the unconscious mind. I see that you mean us well. I see another thing, too—why you came here.”

“Yes. You had to know that anyhow. It was why I asked about duplicating the Power cube.”

“He wants to take it away with him, Llesi,” Orelle said and for the first time Miller realized that Orelle had been in even closer communion with his mind than Llesi himself, who dwelt in its very center. For Llesi had not seen the depths of it—he did not know what Orelle knew now.

“To take it away?” Llesi demanded, incredulity in his thought. “But—”

“Yes,” Orelle said quickly. “We could arrange for that, Llesi. If this plan works well owe him more reward than that.”

“But Orelle,” Llesi persisted, “doesn’t he understand? Doesn’t he know that—”

The thought ceased abruptly, and Miller had the uneasy feeling that the two were communicating on some higher plane of silence where he could not follow them. He was suddenly uneasy. There was something here he didn't understand. The two of them knew something—about himself?—that he did not yet know, something that affected his future intimately.

“What is it?” he demanded. “If I help you, I’ve a right to know.”

Orelle turned to him, her dark eyes gentle now, the hatred and mistrust gone out of them. “There isn’t time,” she said. “Listen.”

Far off, but audible through the opaque walls, the tinkle of falling glass came clearly to them.

“It’s the machine,” Llesi said. “We haven’t time to waste now. If we follow your plan we mustn’t let it win too easily or Brann will suspect. Do you have any ideas of what to do after we enter Brann’s castle?”

“Not yet,” Miller said almost absently. He was thinking hard about the strange little passage just ended. Until this moment he had not dared offer to open his whole mind for their inspection, because he had had nothing to bargain with. Inevitably Orelle would have seen that he wanted the Power and he had nothing to offer in return—until now.

Well, it was a success in one way, but in another—failure? He couldn’t be sure. Oddly the balance had shifted and it was he who mistrusted his companions and they who believed at last that he could be depended on. Certainly they were hiding something vital from him.

“Not yet,” he said again, forcing his mind to take up the immediate problem as the jangle of another falling barrier came more loudly through the walls. “I only know it’s easier to work on inspiration when you’re on the offensive—and once in Brann’s castle, we’ll need inspiration!

“Brann’s—unbalanced. We know that. Push him farther off balance by attacking and maybe we’ll have an advantage. You know, there must be something important he’s hiding or he wouldn’t operate from the dark as he does. If we can see him face to face—well, who knows?”

“When you say ‘we’,” Orelle interrupted, “whom do you mean?”

“Myself. Llesi and me.”

“And Orelle,” the girl said quietly.

“Of course not! It’s going to be dangerous. Besides—”

“No more dangerous to go than to wait for Brann’s vengeance if you fail. Tsi is my sister. I think I can control her and that should be a weapon you may need. You can’t take more than one or two with you if you hope to get in secretly so an army would do no good. But one companion—I think I could be useful to you, Miller.”

“Llesi,” Miller said to the voice in his brain, “what do you think?”

There was silence for a moment. “Let her come,” Llesi said. “What she says about Tsi is true enough. We may need her.”

In the quiet a musical ringing of more breaking glass sounded clearer than before.

“It’s coming,” Llesi said. “Now we have work to do. Are you ready, Miller? Take down that lens mounted on the tesseract and do as I tell you. We mustn’t let the machine win without a struggle. . . .”

CHAPTER VII

Battle of the Titans

In the light of earliest dawn they could see it rolling toward them far off across the plain. Crouching under the loom of Brann's castle walls, Miller and Orelle waited almost in silence. It had seemed wisest to hurry ahead by teleportation and take shelter while Brann was presumably occupying all his powers with the direction of his mechanical warrior as it broke down the walls of the Power chamber and seized at last the thing he had sought so long.

Now the two watchers—three, for Llesi waited in Miller's brain—saw the lazily turning halo of pointed lights which was the Power glowing through the cloudiness of the machine that carried it. Faintly the soundless music of its turning floated to their ears.

"We'll have no time to waste," Llesi warned them. "Brann's wanted the Power for a purpose, you know. Once he learns how to use it there'll be no hope of controlling him. Whatever we do we must do fast."

"Can he learn quickly how to operate it?" Miller asked.

"You're thinking of yourself." Llesi sounded amused. "Yes, it can be mastered without too much difficulty. But don't think about it now, Miller. You have our promise. Be content with that."

Miller stirred restlessly. "You're hiding something. I've opened my mind to you, Orelle. If I deserve any reward for what I'm helping you do I deserve the truth from you. What is it?"

Orelle shook her head. "Don't ask us now. I'll tell you if we come out of this alive. But it will only distract you now. I promise you it's nothing that will affect our plans to conquer Brann. You need all your thoughts to do that. Afterward there'll be time to talk of other things. Look—it's nearly here. I wonder where Brann means to let it into the castle."

The music of the turning stars was clearer now. Miller could feel remotely that extraordinary attraction-repulsion action which the Power constantly exerted—it was so near to them as they crouched in hiding. The machine rolled its cloudy bulk past them, almost brushing their faces with the periphery of its mist, and moved up over the jumble of rocks that bordered Brann's castle.

It pressed close against the surface of the wall. Light glowing down from that extraordinary barrier which ran like water and shone like fire cast colored shadows upon the mist, so that it was like a cumulus of sunset-lighted cloud as it flattened itself against the wall.

Miller could see Orelle's anxious face lighted with strange hues from the water-wall as she watched. He held his breath.

Within the sunset cloud patterns of latticed diamond moved and shifted. The wall surface dimmed as if a breath had blown upon it. Darkness grew where the dimness was—and suddenly a door had opened in the streaming water-light of the barrier.

"Now!" Llesi breathed. "Now—follow it in!" She rushed forward.

There was one breathless, heart-stopping moment when the rocks turned beneath their feet and Orelle, stumbling, nearly fell. The darkness of the opened door was already beginning to mist over with solidity when they reached it.

"Dangerous." Llesi's thought flashed through Miller's brain, lightning-like, far faster than it takes to express in words. "If we miss the turn of the wall-substance we'll be caught in the solid mass. Hurry! Never mind making a noise. Hurry!"

It was like pushing through a thin jelly of darkness that gave way readily enough but thickened perceptibly even as they moved. “Don’t breathe!” Llesi warned them. “Hold your breath if you can—I think you’ll be through in a moment.”

The substance of the wall was a stiff, scarcely yielding stuff by the time they pushed free into clear air. They had made it with nothing to spare. Orelle reached back to touch the surface with a wondering hand as soon as she caught her breath, and the way they had come was already a solid resilient surface that lost its resilience as she pressed it and became hard unyielding wall again.

They stood in a steeply sloping corridor that echoed with the thin voiceless music of the Power. Ahead of them the slowly spinning stars were visible through cloudy grey moving rapidly up the ramp away from them.

Silently they followed.

They were far down under the main floors of the castle. On their left, as they climbed the steep ramp, the wall of flowing light moved ceaselessly, tracing their shadows in the inner wall of the corridor.

“Somewhere there must be guards,” Orelle said.

“I’d feel better if we’d seen some before now,” Llesi told them uneasily. “I have a feeling Brann may be more omniscient than we know.”

The ramp came to a steep end and turned back upon itself in a second long zig-zag rise. They toiled up in the wake of the cloudy robot that carried the Power. Still no guards.

The ramp zig-zagged twice more and then there was a great open area, like a spacious chimney, rising overhead. The ramp had ended. Lightly, like the cloud it was, the robot left the ground. Teleportation carried it out of sight with startling swiftness. From high above the sound of voices drifted down the well, laughter, music.

Without a word Orelle put out her arm and clasped Miller’s hand. A moment later the ground no longer pressed his feet. The light-wall slid down past them like a Niagara of colored water.

The hall in which Brann held court was a vast domed circle. In the center of it rose a dais—and over the dais a curtain of darkness hung in straight columnar folds from the great height of the ceiling, veiling the platform. On its steps a woman was sitting, a stringed instrument on her knee. Rainbow hair swung forward about her shoulders as she bent her head and swept a hand across the strings. Wild, high music rang through the room.

Someone called, “Brann! Where is Brann?” and the woman looked up, smiling. It was Tsi.

“He’ll be here. He’s coming. He expects guests,” she said and looked straight across the room toward the far wall where, in an alcove, the robot stood motionless, enshrouding the Power in a misty cloud.

Behind the robot, huddled against the alcove wall, Miller felt Orelle’s fingers tighten upon his. So long as the robot stood quiet, they were hidden behind its foggy outlines. When it moved—

“She means us,” Orelle whispered. “I know Tsi. What shall we do?”

“Wait,” Llesi counseled. “Listen.”

In the great room beyond, where Brann’s court of brilliantly robed men and women lounged on divans that seemed cushioned with substance as immaterial as mist, a discontented cry was beginning to rise. Many mental voices blended in the clamor now.

“Brann! Call him up, Tsi, call him up! Tell him the robot’s here. We want Brann again!”

Tsi swept the strings musically. “He’s still asleep, down below,” she said. “I’m not sure if I dare wake him yet. Shall I try?”

“Go down and call him,” someone urged, petulance in the voice that spoke. “We’ve waited too long already. Call him, Tsi!”

Tsi smiled. “His visitors must be here by now,” she said maliciously. “Yes, I’ll go down and waken Brann.” She laid the harp on the steps and rose.

At the same moment Miller felt a surge of force suddenly burst into blinding violence in the center of his brain. For an instant he was stunned by the power that seemed to pour tangibly forth from him and through him. . . .

The robot that had screened them from view rose from the floor, lightly as a cloud, drifted forward over the heads of the gaping audience and turned suddenly incandescent just above the dais where Tsi stood.

Miller knew it was Llesi’s doing, even before the quiet voice in his brain said, “This is the best way, after all. Attack. You were right, Miller. Now watch.”

The robot was pure flame now. With a detached part of his mind Miller understood that it must have been deactivated once its mission was completed, so that any mind which teleported it now could do with it as it would. Llesi chose to destroy it in as spectacular a manner as he could contrive.

Out of the blinding cloud of its dissolution the cube of the Power fell, the singing halo in it turning with slow, indifferent steadiness. The transparent block struck the steps a yard from where Tsi stood. It struck—and crashed through, splitting the white marble from top to floor. Tsi staggered.

The crash rang from the high vaults above, rebounding from arch to arch in distant, diminishing echoes that came slowly back to the watcher below, long after the dais had ceased to vibrate.

Tsi recovered her balance, turned on the shattered steps, looked straight across the hall to the alcove where Miller and Orelle stood.

She was shaken but she had not lost her poise.

“Sister!” she said, “Welcome to Brann’s castle. Shall I call him to greet you?”

From Orelle a strong steady thought went out, compelling and quiet.

“Tsi, sister, you must do as you think best. Is it best for us that Brann be called?”

The woman on the dais hesitated. Miller could see that the quiet confidence in Orelle’s mental voice has shaken her a little. He knew now what Orelle had meant when she said she could control Tsi.

It was a simple matter of sister speaking to sister with the voice of authority, calling back to mind the precepts of conscience and childhood training. Tsi was not, he thought, evil as Brann was evil. She was weak, certainly—and perhaps the weakness would stand them in good stead.

She said uncertainly, “Orelle, I think perhaps—” But the voices from the audience around her, rising with sudden violence, drowned out whatever it was she meant to say. Miller was reminded of Roman audiences clamoring for blood in the arena.

“Brann, *Brann!*” the voices howled. “Waken Brann! Go call him up to meet his guests! *Brann*, waken from your sleep! Brann, *Brann*, do you hear us?”

Tsi hesitated a moment longer. Miller was aware of a desperate stream of thought-waves pouring out from Orelle beside him but the noise of the assembled people was too strong for

her. She could not get through to her sister. Tsi turned suddenly, putting both hands to her face, and stumbled up the broken steps toward the dais.

The long curtains that hung a hundred feet or more from the height of the ceiling trembled down all their dark length as she put them aside and vanished into the big tent they made, hiding the platform.

There was a moment's profound silence.

Then Miller said quietly to Orelle, "Come on," and, seizing her hand, strode forward across the floor. He had no idea what he meant to do but if he had come to attack then attack he must—not stand waiting for Brann to make an entrance on his throne.

Heads turned avidly to watch their progress across the great room. No one made a move to block their way, but eager eyes watched every motion they made and searched their faces for expression. This was the audience, Miller thought grimly, that would have watched Brann's terrible "experiments" upon him if he had not escaped from the castle—with Tsi's help. It was the audience, he realized, that might yet watch, if he failed.

Llesi was silent in his brain, waiting.

They were almost at the steps when the curtains stirred as if a breath of wind had blown through the hall. Tsi's voice came weakly from the hidden place, "Wait, Brann—you mustn't —"

But drowning out the feeble protest another voice sounded clear. Miller, hearing that thin, sweet, sneering pattern which was the mental voice he had heard before, the voice of Brann, felt a chill sliding down his spine and a tightening of all his muscles. It was a hateful, a frightening voice, evoking a picture of a hateful man.

"Come out, Brann!" Miller said strongly. "Unless you're afraid of us—come out!"

Behind him in the hall two or three intrepid voices echoed the invitation. "Come out Brann! Let us see you. You aren't afraid, Brann—come out!" He knew from that how high curiosity must run even in Brann's stronghold and he realized that not even here, then, had Brann ever yet showed his face. It made him a little more confident. If Brann had so much to hide, then, there must be weaknesses behind that curtain upon which he could play.

He said, "Here's the Power you wanted, Brann. We broke your platform but here it is waiting. Do you dare come out and look at it?"

Brann said nothing. But his thin, sardonic laughter rang silently through the hall.

Miller felt it rasping his nerves like something tangible. He said roughly, "All right then—I'll come and bring you out!" And he set his foot firmly on the lowest step.

A breath of excitement and anticipation ran rippling through the hall. Llesi was still silent. Orelle's hand in Miller's squeezed his fingers reassuringly. He mounted the second step, reached out his free hand for the curtain. . . .

There was a deep, wrenching sound of stone against stone, and under his feet the steps lurched sickeningly. And then he was falling.

The walls spun. The floor tilted up to strike him a solid blow—that did not touch him. For some firm, supporting mind closed its protection around his body and he floated gently a dozen feet and came to solid footing again, dazed but unharmed.

The marble block of steps lay upturned upon the floor. Teleportation again, he realized. Brann had uprooted the steps he had climbed to prevent him from reaching the curtain. And someone—Llesi or Orelle—had reached out a mental beam to teleport him to safety.

Brann's cold clear laughter rang silently through the hall. He had not yet spoken. He did not speak now but his derision was like vitriol to the ears and the mind. Brann was waiting. . . . Somehow Miller could sense that, as he waited, an eagerness and impatience went out from him toward that block of transparency on the broken steps, where the halo of the Power revolved on its singing axis.

Llesi realized it in the same instant and Miller felt in his brain the beginnings of some plan take shape—too late. For now there was a strange heaviness in the very air about him—a familiar heaviness. . . . This was the weapon Brann had used on him once before, turning the air itself to a crushing weight that had all but smashed his ribs in upon the laboring lungs.

He felt his knees buckle under that sudden, overwhelming pressure. The air screamed around him and the vast hanging curtains of the dais billowed with a serpentine motion as displaced air moved with hurricane suddenness through the great room. Miller's breath was stopped in his chest by that unbearable pressure. His ears sang and the room swam redly before him. Brann's careless laughter was a distant ripple of sound.

Power from outside himself gathered in Miller's brain, gathered and spilled over in a wave like molten flame. He felt it gush out toward the platform where Brann sat hidden. But he was blind and deaf with the crushing weight of that suddenly ponderable air.

Even above his own deafness and the shriek of the unnatural wind in the room he heard the scream of riven marble. And the weight upon him lessened a little. He could see again. He could see the great block of stone uprooted with jagged edges from the broken floor at the foot of Brann's dais.

It seemed to tear itself free, to leap into the air of its own volition—to hurtle toward Brann's curtains as if Brann's castle itself had suddenly turned upon him with great jagged stone fangs. In his brain Miller could feel the tremendous, concentrated effort of Llesi's teleportation, balancing the marble weapon and guiding it on its course.

The weight upon him ceased abruptly. The release was so sudden that the congested blood drained from Miller's brain and for an instant the great room swam before him. In that moment of faltering the hurtling marble fragment faltered too and Llesi and Miller together struggled with the faintness of Miller's overtaxed brain.

Brann seized the opening that brief hesitation gave him. He could not stop the flying weapon but he could block it. . . . A broken segment of the marble steps flew up in the path of the oncoming boulder, grated against it, deflected its course.

The two struck together upon the dais steps and thundered down them with a ponderous sort of deliberation, bounding from step to step, their echoes rolling from the high ceiling. They went crashing across the floor, ploughing into the divans where Brann's court had lain watching this unexpected sight.

The screams of the watchers as the great marble blocks rolled down upon them added a frenzied accompaniment to the echoes of thunder wakened by the stone itself. The room was a tumult of sound re-echoing upon sound.

Miller felt a renewed outpouring of Llesi's power move in his brain. He saw a gigantic marble pillar across the room stagger suddenly on its base, crack across, lean majestically outward and fall. But it did not strike the floor. Instead it hurtled headlong, jagged end first, toward the dais.

Above it the ceiling buckled. There was a terrible shriek of metal upon stone as the vaulted roof gave way. But the falling debris, in turn, did not strike the floor. Deflected in a

rain of shattered marble, it moved to intercept the flying pillar. Column and broken stone together crashed to the ground at the very foot of Brann's dais.

The great hall was full of the shrieks of the scattering court, the cries of men caught beneath the falling ceiling, the uproar of echo upon echo as Brann's throne room collapsed in thunderous noise upon its own floor.

When the thunder ceased all who could flee had vanished. Half the ceiling lay in fragments upon the floor and Miller stood dizzily looking up at the dais whose long curtains still billowed in the wind. Brann was silent for a moment as if gathering his resources for another try. And Llesi was whispering,

"My strength is failing, Miller. I can't keep it up much longer. I'm going to try one last thing. I've got to know what it is Brann's hiding. Help me if you can—and watch!"

For an instant there was silence. Then, from far overhead, a long shudder began and rippled down the length of those vast hanging curtains which shrouded Brann's dais. Stone groaned deeply upon stone in the ceiling.

From the hidden platform Brann shrieked a soundless, "*No!*" as the block from which the curtains hung tore itself free of the vault above and came crashing down to rebound from the shattering pavement.

The curtains themselves fell far more slowly. Like smoke they wavered in the air, collapsing softly, deliberately, parting to one side and the other. . . .

Miller could see Brann trying to stop that fall. Invisibly the forces of his mind seemed to claw at their drifting lengths. But there was something wrong now in Brann's mind. Even Miller could sense it.

A dissolution was taking place that the mind felt and shrank from. Something worse than hysteria, more frightening than fear itself. Llesi was suddenly intent and Orelle caught her breath.

Like smoke the last fragments of the curtains parted, lying to left and right along the broken floor, far out, in long swaths of shadow.

On the platform stood Brann. . . .

The figure that had terrorized such a multitude for so long stood swaying, clutching a black cloak about it as if to hide the shape of the body beneath. The face was contorted into a terrible grimace of anger and cold grinning hate. But the face itself was one they had all seen before.

It was the face of Tsi.

Her eyes were closed. She did not look at them nor speak nor move. And, Miller thought to himself, as Brann perhaps she had never opened her eyes. As Brann perhaps that grimace of chill hate always distorted her features. For it was clear to them all now that Tsi was mad.

"Schizophrenia," Miller thought automatically. "Split personality." But there was no answering thought from Llesi or from Orelle. Stunned amazement held them both frozen.

Tsi turned her unseeing eyes to Orelle. In Brann's thin, cold, high-pitched voice-pattern she said, "Now you know. Now you've seen Brann. But before I kill you both, tell me—Orelle, *where is Tsi?*"

Miller felt a cold shudder ripple over him.

CHAPTER VIII

The Consuming Fire

At the same moment he realized that Orelle and Llesi could not help him against—Brann. Their thoughts came into his mind with a stunned, incredulous tinge of astonishment, a blank bafflement that, strangely, seemed to leave them helpless. And Miller thought he knew why.

Orelle and Llesi and all their race had been conditioned to mental perfection. Never before in their history, he sensed, had there been any case of mental aberration. The race had been too perfect for that. And now, faced with the pattern of schizophrenic split-personality, they were utterly unable to comprehend its meaning. It was too alien to them.

Insanity had never before existed in Orelle's race.

Miller sent a frantic message to Llesi—inchoate confused memory-pictures from his scant knowledge of psycho-therapy. But Llesi did not understand. Instead he suddenly closed his mind. And, beside Miller, Orelle, too, closed her mind against a concept so shocking to this race that worshiped mental perfection that they could not consciously face it.

The blind figure on the dais bent forward. "Orelle. . . ." it said.

So Brann did not know that the other half of his mind belonged to Tsi. Naturally! Brann would not know that he was a half, an incomplete split personality. Nor would Tsi know that Brann was part of herself. What curious warp in the inherited genes had brought about this cleavage Miller never knew, but he did not think about that now.

He stepped forward.

"Brann!" he called.

"So you are back." The thought came coldly into his mind. "Well, the machine I tricked you into carrying failed to kill Llesi but I'll remedy that soon enough. As for you. . . ." Thin mental laughter mocked Miller.

He felt sweat crawling down his forehead. "Wait," he thought urgently. "I can tell you where Tsi is."

He sensed a hesitancy and then an urgent, straining question.

"Where? *Where is she?*"

"You are—"

Miller felt the mind on the dais close swiftly against the thought. Brann would not let himself listen to the truth. He could not.

Brann thought. "Well? Answer me?"

Troubled, uncomprehending, Orelle and Llesi waited and listened. And suddenly Miller knew the answer. He unbuckled the wrist-watch from his arm. Orelle had returned it to him, the deadly lightning machine removed. As a timepiece it was useless but habit had made Miller keep the watch.

"Take this," he said.

Brann—Tsi—waited.

Miller held it up. "It's not dangerous any more. Can't you tell that?"

"A trick. You know nothing of what I wish to know. Why should I waste time on any of you?"

"If you want to find Tsi," Miller thought, "you must take this thing. Unless you're afraid to find her."

The watch spun from his hand and shot glittering across the room. It was in Brann's hand. Miller drew a long breath. "Turn it over. That's it. Hold it up before your face. Yes. Now . . . open your eyes."

"My eyes will not open."

"Open them!"

"They have never opened."

Tension sang through the still air. Miller felt Orelle's sudden movement toward him.

"If you open your eyes you will find Tsi."

That was the gap in the armor. That was the one thing that could pierce Brann's insane half-mind. The blind white eyelids quivered . . . the long lashes lifted, slowly, slowly. . . .

Brann's eyes looked into the polished steel back of the watch. In that tiny mirror Brann's eyes looked into—Tsi's!

Tsi's eyes—wide, horrified—stared into Brann's!

There was no protection against the mental avalanche that roared out from that rocking, screaming mind—the two minds—in the single body of Tsi. For the first time Brann saw the girl he had searched for since his strange birth. And for the first time Tsi saw her own face twisted, distorted, into the grimace of chilly hatred that was irrevocably stamped on Brann's features.

But what Miller felt was—pity. It was the basic principle of mental therapy—making the patient face his problem squarely. But no ordinary human schizophrenic had ever thus had the curtains of his brain ripped away with such sudden violence. The normal human brain has automatic safeguards against such intrusion.

Tsi was of another race—a race mentally developed to a tremendously high standard. She had been warped before birth though the madness had remained latent for a long time—but her mind was nevertheless powerful enough to be able to face the shocking incredible truth.

She had never been evil, as was Brann—weak, yes, but incapable of that cold cruelty her alter ego loved.

Face to face, for a thunderous, eternity-long instant, the two stood—good and evil mated, monstrously wedded in one body and one brain. The silence roared.

Then the hand that held the mirror dropped. The face of Tsi swung round so that her mad, wild, terrified eyes met Miller's—and he read destruction there. The double mind looked out of those eyes into his and for an instant it was as if both Tsi and Brann spoke to him—as he had first heard them speaking when he woke in this incredible world.

But then they had not known the truth. It had been a split mind talking to itself, good and evil debating together and not guessing they were housed in a single brain. Now they knew. At some point in the past the evil inherent in Tsi had lost its battle with the good in her—and pulled free of the control of her conscious mind. It had called itself by a new name, given itself a masculine identity to disguise its origin still further, grown so strong that not even Tsi could control it any longer.

Brann was abhorrent to Tsi. And to Brann the knowledge that Tsi was himself was a thing he could not face. The split mind, rocking on its foundation, reached out into Miller's mind with a mad destructive violence.

"You brought ruin on me!" cried the double voice. "You wrecked my castle and my life! You must die and all your kind with you!"

The eyes caught Miller's in a drowning stare. He could not look away, and the eyes were growing larger and larger, engulfing him in darkness and in the darkness the madness of two minds swirled terribly, carrying away his own sanity on those dreadful, reasonless vortices. . . .

Miller could no longer see Orelle but he heard her moan, a soft whimper of helpless terror. "I can't—help you," she was saying from far away. "I can't fight the two of them. Llesi—Llesi—where are you?"

For a moment there was no answer. The mad twin-mind buffeted at Miller's from both sides at once, pulling it asunder, spinning in two opposite directions and straining him apart between them. No single mind could withstand the doubled strength of that split brain dragging him down to madness. . . .

And then, suddenly, he was not fighting alone. Out of the darkness Llesi's mind came swiftly, intangibly, yet with a strength as if the man himself had set his shoulder against Miller's, bracing him against the whirlpool whose vortex led down to insanity.

Perhaps no other mind in existence could have stood against the riven mind of Brann-Tsi. But in Miller's brain too a double mind had been housed—his own and Llesi's. They had learned to work together. And now they could fight. . . .

There was a voiceless scream of fury—Brann's thin, high, sweet-toned rage. And the buffeting redoubled from two sides at once. But now there were two minds to meet the attack. Miller drew a deep breath and set himself stubbornly against the whirling drag that was pulling him down to darkness. He could feel the strong resistance of Llesi's mind, fighting beside his own, struggling hard against the double pull.

For a timeless moment the vortex held them both. In that roaring silence, while madness raved about them, neither side seemed able to shake the others. Attacker and attacked stood matched so perfectly that the balance might have held forever with the fury of the split mind screaming its soundless cry in infinity.

Then the scream shivered up to a peak of madness that no sane mind could sustain. And while the vortex still rang with it . . .

The robed figure on the dais moved suddenly. Miller's blindness lifted again. He could see the dark robe stream back from Tsi's rainbow garments as she plunged down the steps toward the crystal block, where the halo of the Power turned in its singing silence.

A bolt of the mind reached out before her toward the halo—a summoning bolt. One quivering thought shook the air of the room. Death was the thought. Tsi and Brann could not live together in the same brain and face the knowledge of their oneness. There was no choice but death for them now.

The bolt of white lightning blazed up to meet that plunging figure in answer to its summons. Blazed up and swallowed Tsi—and Brann.

There was a shimmer in the air where the body and the twin mind had hovered. And then—nothing. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Fairy Gold

Miller found himself sitting on the broken marble steps with his head in his hands. How long a time had passed he had no idea. Orelle's touch on his shoulder made him look up at last. She was smiling a little but her eyes were grave.

"Are you all right now?" she asked. "You're safe. We're all safe, thanks to you. I'm glad I've never known your world if you could understand a thing like that—that madness. But I'm glad you did understand it—for our sakes. You saved us, Miller. You can ask your own reward."

He looked at her groggily, thinking with incongruous steadiness that he was probably suffering from shock now and not really responsible. But he glanced involuntarily toward the crystal block of the Power.

Orelle's smile was sad. "Yes," she said, "we can make you a duplicate if you ask us. But it would be effort wasted in the end."

He stared at her, not understanding. Then his eyes went beyond her to the shattered wall and the beautiful shining day outside. New senses were burgeoning in him and he could sense in that glittering sunlight colors and sounds and glories beyond anything words could tell.

The air was a tangible thing against his cheek, velvet soft, sweeter than perfume. He was beginning to perceive new shapes moving dimly on the edge of vision, as if there were a whole unknown world just now slowly unveiling before his freshly opened eyes.

Miller laughed suddenly. "I know what you mean," he said. "I must be stupid, not to have seen it until now. Of course I won't want a duplicate of the Power. Why should I? I'm not going back to Slade. I'd be crazy if I left a paradise like this. What good would a duplicate do me when I'm staying on here—forever!"

Orelle shook her shining head. Her eyes were very sad. In a gentle voice she began to speak. And Llesi's voice, gentle too in the dimness of his mind, spoke with her.

Very quietly they told him the truth.

"So you know now it was fairy gold," the Belgian said, sliding the bottle across the table. "Well, I could not have made you believe. You had to experience it yourself."

Miller looked at nothing.

Van Hornung glanced toward the fire, shivered and reached out a stubby finger toward the dull cube on the table between them.

"Drink," he said.

Slowly Miller obeyed. There was a long silence.

Finally Van Hornung said, "It is—still the same up there? The castles and the wonderful people and the—colors? But it would be. The colors—I was an artist once. I think the colors meant most to me. There were so many we do not know."

"Orelle told me," Miller said dully. "I wouldn't believe her. I didn't want to believe her."

"There are the legends, Miller," Van Hornung said. "You and I aren't the first. We won't be the last. There have always been stories of humans who visit Paradise for a little while—and leave again. I'm no scientist. I never knew why—"

Miller glanced up. His eyes brightened a little.

“It was an unstable compound,” he said. “There was an atomic change, you see. The Path does that. Your atomic structure shifts to something quite different. When you’re like that you can talk with your mind, without words.”

“I know,” the Belgian said. “I do not talk much any more. It is never the same, after that.”

“Will it ever. . . ?”

Van Hornung said quietly, “We were like gods for a little while. We ate the food of the gods. Can we expect mortal food to please us after that?”

Miller nodded in silence. To go back to his old world, to live his old life would be meaningless now—like going back to blindness after knowing sight in a brighter world than this. He had had a taste of this once, in Orelle’s castle, while they searched him with piercing electronic eyes for the weapon he did not know he carried. That had been an illusion and a foretaste of this death-in-life which he must live now until he died—as the Belgian had been living.

He remembered how the mountain-top world had begun to fade around him, Orelle’s pitying face growing ghostlike, the glass walls of her castle turning to mist and the wonderful nameless colors of her gardens thinning away to nothingness while the snow-covered peaks took shape solidly behind them.

There had been a little time longer, after Brann’s defeat, for him to enjoy the last days of Paradise. He had refused to believe it could end at all. He had shut his mind to the instability of his change, to the fact that he had been himself an isotope created by a temporary radioactive atomic shift so that, when the quantum energy was released, the atomic pattern must revert to its former state. And in one terrible, fading instant the familiar prison of his own senses closed around him once more as the lovely world of Peak Seven Hundred went volatile and vanished.

The last thing to go was the little cube Llesi had made for him with the singing halo of the Power turning in miniature within it. When the waste of glacial ice was all that remained of the invisible castle he went slowly down the mountain again, walking, he knew, through fields of glowing flowers he could never see again. And now it was the ice and snow that seemed illusion—the vanished summer world the only real thing in life.

He kept taking the cube out and looking at it as he descended the lower slopes. After awhile it seemed dimmer than he remembered, the singing fainter. When he reached the valley the glow was gone entirely. The cube was non-radioactive lead, inert and useless. Fairy gold, the legends said, was glittering in your hands when the immortals put it there—but when you looked again it had always turned to leaves and pebbles.

Van Hornung said, “What will you do now?”

Miller shrugged. “Is anything worth doing?”

“Not for me, any longer. After you have seen the colors and used your mind to its fullest, there is nothing worth the effort of doing in this world below. Stay with me if you like. It does not matter.”

Behind Miller the door opened quietly. Slade walked into the room. When he saw Miller his jaw dropped slightly.

“*Miller!* What’s the matter with you? When did you get in?”

“Just now.”

“Did you get it?”

“Get what?” Miller said dully.

“The energy-source!” Slade thrust his face down to Miller’s, the feral eyes narrowing, the thin lips tight. Seeing him, Miller thought suddenly of Brann. The same irresponsible power, dangerous, hungry, admitting no discipline but its own desires.

He was glad, in a casual way, that Slade could never use the Power. Slade could do harm enough, had done more than harm enough, with only his own driving unscrupulous brain to guide him. Once armed with a thing like the Power. . . .

“I left it where I found it,” Miller said indifferently. “Up on the Peak.”

“How can we get it?” Slade demanded urgently. “An expedition?”

“You can have it for the asking—up there.” A slow idea took shape in Miller’s mind. Sardonically he said, “Look for the red path at the foot of the cliff. Follow it. Go on up and you’ll have no trouble finding your energy-source. That’s all I’m going to say. We’re through, Slade. Get out.”

And he would say no more though it was ten minutes before Slade exhausted his threats and arguments and left. Miller smiled wryly at the Belgian.

“He’ll go. You couldn’t keep him away. And you know what will happen.”

“What happened to us. But—why did you send him?”

Miller stared out the window at the snowy cone of Peak Seven Hundred, white and empty against the sky.

“I hated Slade once,” he said. “That doesn’t matter how. But where men like Slade go there’s cruelty and misery and suffering. I can at least spare a few other men what I’ve gone through from him. He’ll come back—as we are. As for the Power—yes, it’s fairy gold.”

The Belgian said softly, “. . .amid such greater glories that we are worse than blind.”

Miller nodded. “The Power and the Glory. Some day our race may achieve it. But it has to be earned.”

He reached for the bottle.

[The end of *The Power and the Glory*, by Henry Kuttner]