



*Straight into the black pit Ford dropped*

## Red Twilight

*Neither the pleas of fellow humans nor the stealthy, treacherous attacks of half-human monsters shook the determination of Paul, ruler of Mars, to steal Earth's water*

**By HARL VINCENT**

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### LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

**F**ORD MATTHEWS was sitting in the office of his export business near Wall Street one June morning, wishing he could get away from the irksome grind. Suddenly the shrieks of his secretary called attention to a red film which was tinting

the sun. Crowds were soon milling in the streets, as the sun sank in a terrifying red haze. Screams, shouts, moans rang up from the mob, where frightened humans crushed together in a panic.

Ford called a scientific friend on the

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visiphone; and was urgently summoned to the scientist's laboratory. While on his way there, he saw that the government's proclamations had calmed the people with a story that the red fog was a passing cosmic cloud.

Arriving at the workshop of Owen Wardell, a brilliant physicist outlawed for his advanced ideas, Ford found to his amazement that Wardell's anti-gravity space ship was completed. True, he had been working on the vehicle for years, but the difficulties were endless. Money for all the experiments had been supplied by Ford, who believed in the project and hoped above hope to reach Mars and find his brother Paul, who had set out for that planet with twenty others in a big rocket ship a score of years before.

Owen Wardell scoffed at the proclamations from Washington, and said that the red light was the result of a ray from Mars—a warlike move of Martians. It was not harmless—for the Earth's supply of water was rapidly disappearing!

Washington would not believe Wardell's explanation, however. Only one solution offered hope. Owen and Ford must set out for Mars.

The space ship proved a great success. Reaching Mars, they were guided by Neet, a friendly little Martian, to the palace of the ruler, Bahspahl. "Boss Paul" was a giant, a human, a great bearded Viking of a man, who confirmed their guess that he was Ford's brother, Paul Matthews, but flatly refused to shut off the deadly red rays. Mars needed the water. The giant Paul did not seem to have the human sympathy which Ford had anticipated.

Paul's bodyguard consisted of two steel robots, grim and evil-looking monsters with arms like massive steel

cables. While Ford was alone with them, one suddenly seized him and hurled him into a black pit which had opened in the floor.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECRET FORCES.

DOWN a long corridor floored with black marble the mighty Paul led Owen Wardell. It did not occur to Owen that they were leaving Ford in danger, even though the two robots were standing in the big room. The scientist was still wondering why Paul was so cold toward his brother.

"It surprises you," Owen asked, "to see Ford here?"

The big man strode on silently at his side, still unwilling to tell what seemed to be on his mind. He had been deeply affected, yet he had acted oddly for one so long gone from his own land. He had asked no word about his father.

"Surprises me, yes," he returned, without enthusiasm. "But I would not have known him. He was quite a youngster then; now he is a full-grown man."

Owen tried another question.

"The arrival of our space ship in the square before your residence was a surprise, of course?"

"Yes, although we always thought one might reach here some day." The Boss raised his eyes.

There was something of suspicion, almost of alarm in the quick look he gave Owen. All was not well in Square House.

"Where are the others?" Wardell asked, thinking of the "we" in the man's hesitant reply to his last question. "Those who came over in the

rocket? There were about twenty, I believe."

A sudden look of ferocity came from under the bushy blond brows.

"Must I give you an account of the past twenty years? I who am master here?"

Owen threw caution to the winds in a flare-up of fury.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You're an Earthman and should have some sort of feeling for mankind. Instead, you don't give a damn; you met us with open antagonism; your own blood brother means nothing to you, it seems. What the devil is wrong here?"

"You talk to me this way?" The giant's face was gray with anger.

"I do. I'll talk even if you break my neck with those big hands of yours." The lean, bent body of the scientist straightened determinedly.

They had entered the ornamental cage of a lift and the other had placed a hand on the starting lever. He removed it now and the thick fingers twitched. Owen caressed the butt of his automatic where it lay in his pocket. Then the Viking guffawed.

"Forget it!" he laughed. "I suppose I have become peculiar in these twenty years, from your point of view. What of it? I remember your name, Wardell; you were a scrapper in those days. Had the engineering societies in an uproar most of the time."

Owen flushed, but he was relieved. Perhaps, after all, Ford would be able to win over this queer, changeable brother of his. They would have to handle him with care, however.

"Sorry I was hot-headed," said Owen crisply.

"Never mind. We're to have some long talks together, Wardell, about my companions in the rocket ship—" He

hesitated and his lashes flickered strangely. "They have all died," he said brusquely, avoiding Owen's eyes, "except Carlotta, my wife. She was the widow of Charles Best. And her daughter Nina, Best's daughter, born the first year we were here. That is all—three of us."

"It can't be—"

"Yes, let me tell you!" Paul's tongue loosened and the swift words came. "The rocket ship accounted for eight. There was an accident soon after we left Earth. One of the stern tubes blew out, throwing us violently from our course. The shock killed them. Art Carey—you knew him. Davis, Trent, Tom and Mary Baxter—Fields—"

A shot rang out, echoing in the corridor along which they had come. Owen yelled; there was no mistaking the roar of that .38 Colt.

"Ford!" he shouted, leaping through the door of the lift. "It's him, Paul—his gun!"

In a single bound the Boss had passed him and was running with great strides toward the room they had left. His furious bellows echoed awesomely in the long, empty hall.

OUT of breath from his exertions, Owen stumbled into the room not ten steps behind the big man of Square House. Paul Matthews was standing, petrified, before the still form of one of the robots close to the table. The irregular trap-door had closed again, and no line showed where it had opened.

Ford was not there.

"Where is he?" Owen demanded of Paul.

Paul turned on him fiercely. "Don't ask me!" he roared. "Look! Do you realize what's happened?"

His finger pointed to the headpiece of the robot. Owen saw a ragged opening where one eye had been. Paul's finger was trembling—with rage, or excitement. He seemed to be amazed at the turn of events, though he might have been acting.

"Ford's bullet!" Owen cried. "The damn' thing was after him." He turned fiercely on Paul. "What are these machine-men, anyhow? Who owns them? Who controls them—and what are they trying to do to us?"

The big man's face went rigid, and his lips met in a straight line. He would not answer.

Owen's eyes again took in every part of the big room. Ford had vanished as if by black magic. The scientist closed his fingers on the butt of his pistol; had Paul covered.

"Find your brother at once," he threatened, "or I'll kill you."

The giant laughed harshly, a sinister rumble.

"Put away that gun, you fool, if you want to see Ford alive. You could never get him back. Maybe I can. There are dark forces on this planet—things you never dreamed of on Earth."

The bearded giant was across to the table in a bound, glaring at a small black cube. Talking. Owen hesitated, his finger trembling on the trigger of the automatic. Paul waved him away, scowling and shaking his head. He returned the pistol to his pocket, suddenly ashamed. Paul was not the cause of his brother's disappearance. He seemed as astounded as Owen.

"Carlotta!" Paul was saying. "You are in your room? Good, I must see you at once." He left off the use of English and spoke rapidly a few harsh words in the outlandish tongue of the Martians.

"Stay here," he said to Owen, "and keep out of this. It's for your own good and Ford's."

Then he was out of the room, and Owen heard his ponderous running footsteps in the hall, dying away. A moment later Owen was after him; saw him turn a corner and vanish in a side passage.

Silent as a tomb the gloomy halls of Square House were now. With his heart pounding, with eyes and ears alert, and with the automatic pistol gripped in tense fingers, Owen went in the direction Paul had taken.

At the end of the small side passage was a metal door. There was no knob or latch. He pushed his shoulder against it. Slowly it yielded, and Owen thrust his pistol forward as he peered through the crack. A small room was beyond, empty.

When he entered he thought he heard voices behind a second door which opened from the tiny cubicle. Martian voices! Shrill and unintelligible. They were approaching.

He drew back into a corner as the second door swung open. Two of the gnome-folk came in, jabbering excitedly in their own tongue. They were attired in tight silken shirts and knee-length breeches of shiny stuff like patent leather, as Bahspahl had been. But the costume had lent the air of a swaggering buccaneer to the big American. It served only to make the small Martians ridiculous. Their bloated chests, large ears and spindly limbs made them seem like grotesque, dressed-up marionettes.

They passed through the cubicle without seeing Owen. Beyond the second door another hall extended. Like the rest of the mansion, it was lighted with a soft golden glow from walls and ceiling. At the end of this hall

Owen came to a narrow, unlighted passage. He stopped, listening; he thought he heard a voice, harsh and masculine. Then followed hollow, complete silence.

Something clanked there in the darkness, and Owen's heart stood still. A light flashed on, and he saw one of the robots standing at an open door. He had heard a voice; it came through clear and distinct now. Paul's!

The robot's eye-lenses were turned away, so that whoever was at the controls could not see him. The voices came from a door but a few feet away. The robot stood further along the hall. Owen decided to risk being seen by the lenses, and slipped on tiptoes to the door through which the voice was coming.

He saw the robot step back ponderously through another door. The light in the narrow passage flashed off. In a room of luxurious hangings and heavy with the odor of incense a man and a woman were talking. Paul and Carlotta. Owen slid in through the door, which was ajar, and secreted himself behind a painted screen that stood there. He could see them through a narrow slot that divided the screen vertically.

She was a magnificent specimen, this Carlotta. Almost an Oriental. As dark as Paul was light, she was an alluring exotic beauty. Reclining on a low, cushioned affair like a *chaise longue*, her superb figure was covered only by the flimsiest of material. Long black lashes lay on her smooth creamy cheeks. Scarlet lips were drawn in a tight line as Paul talked.

Her eyes startled Owen when she raised the long lashes. Mysterious fires burned in those intense orbs. Their color was indeterminable, but he knew they were dark. Hypnotic; insistent. A

man like Paul Matthews would do much for such a woman.

"PAUL," she was saying, and her voice was like a purring kitten's.

"what's this man like—this one who claims to be Ford?"

"A handsome devil, and well set up. Just the sort I would expect him to be. Fearless, too. I hope they didn't get him; those devils down there."

So Paul Matthews did have human feelings. Owen pricked up his ears.

"Don't worry," the woman said. "They'll be in time, Misor and Zan. We'll know in a few minutes."

"Ought to go below myself," Paul said gloomily.

"No, no—Paul!" The woman sat erect, her face draining of color. "Tell me you'll never go down! For Carlotta—please!"

There was stark terror in her voice. A deep mystery was here. Owen felt again the power of mysterious forces that lay beneath the calm exterior of Square House. Something deep and terrible—so terrible that it could not even be mentioned.

"You win; you always do." Paul raised his great bulk wearily, then paced the floor like a caged beast. The woman's eyes followed him warily.

Owen was puzzled. One minute it seemed that those astounding orbs were adoring the big man who paced there; worshiping him beyond the ken of any mortal. The next instant they were hating, with bestial fury!

A voice whispered from one of those black cubes on a taboret close by the screen. Owen shrank back. Paul was electrified. He touched a switch, and the voice spoke up louder in the shrill sibilants of a Martian.

Paul replied swiftly and in furious tones, using that gibberish of the



dwarf-folk. Owen could have cried out in his uncertainty. This was torture.

"There are the radium pits yet," Paul was saying, "and the branch aqueducts. Find him!" The big fellow dropped into his chair once more and sat with head bowed in his hands.

"Of course they'll find him." The woman's voice was soothing.

Yet Owen experienced a chill of sudden foreboding. This woman was a dual personality. She could be a vicious Jezebel in one rôle, a saint in the other. And Owen was convinced by what he saw in the swift cruelty of that beautiful face that she knew what had happened to Ford—had a hand in it herself.

*Click!* A rope of cold steel twined around Owen's neck, choking him. Bodily he was lifted from where he crouched and swung high in the air; shaken crazily by that chill thing which gripped him.

His vocal cords paralyzed by the pressure, he could not cry out. His eyes saw only a bloody haze. Like the red twilight, it was. Drifting, swaying, his senses reeling—Something broke then in his mind—sounded like a pistol shot—

He knew no more.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CAVERNS OF TERROR.

**F**ORD MATTHEWS heard the trap-door shut with a thud as he dropped swiftly into the blackness. He struggled to right himself, that he might land on his feet. If the pit ended in a solid bottom, he might manage to escape with no more than a broken leg. If there was water, his body would cleave it.

Down he sped in the foul inkiness. His mind, he knew, was working with extreme rapidity. There was water down there—he smelled it.

He struck its rankly odorous surface with a splash that echoed deafeningly in his ears. His body drove into its depths swiftly and cleanly. Down he went like a plummet. It was bitter cold and bitter to the nostrils, that foul liquid into which he had been flung. Water? This was sewage, more likely.

Powerfully he struck out, and it seemed he would never reach the surface. His lungs were bursting, and little light-flecks danced before his open eyes. There was nothing to be seen in the swirling darkness, but these flickerings told him he could not hold his breath an instant longer.

And then, when he was at the limit of endurance, he thrashed out on top. Drawing the vile air into his lungs in convulsive sobbing gulps. Drifting in the sluggish, sucking current.

Whoever it was that operated the radio control of the robot, had seen to it that the metal monster made a thorough job of it. This place was a horrible death chamber. Dark as a pocket and reeking of poisonous corruption. Ford swam slowly and with frequent rests, floating to conserve his strength.

Endless time passed, dragging. His stroke was feeble now; muscles refused his bidding. Then his hand encountered a rock wall. Stiff fingers closed on a projecting stone and he clung to it, panting.

Off there in the darkness was a faint green light. Shivering, he regarded it. He knew he could never span that distance swimming. Then too, it looked more like a patch of phosphorescence than daylight or any ordi-

nary artificial light. He was done for, unless he could get solid ground under his feet; his teeth chattered with the cold, and he was dizzy with weakness.

An eerie scream rang through the cavern, clamoring wildly from unknown depths and reverberating in the unseen vastness of the place. A crackling flash then, like the lightning of Earth, illuminated huge stalactites, icicle-like, high overhead. In that brief instant he also saw a narrow ledge along the rocky wall.

He reached out weakly. With his last ounce of energy he pulled himself up and lay there gasping.

**S**LOWLY Ford's strength returned. In a languid half-stupor he lay hardly caring whether he lived or died. Thinking. Trying to figure things out. Some awful menace hung over Square House; he had sensed it in his brother's manner. Something they feared up there; a power they could not fully comprehend or overcome. It couldn't be the gnome-folk. They were harmless enough—friendly. What then? Evil minds were at work somewhere about the place. Devilish hands had operated the robot control.

Strange rustlings and whisperings came from out the darkness and Ford staggered to his feet. Straining his eyes in the Stygian gloom, he heard them again; faint whistling twitters. A cold chill chased down his spine. He felt his way along the ledge, advancing toward the distant green luminescence.

His heart did a flip-flop at sound of a soft voice close at hand. A girl's voice, throaty and mellow. Halting abruptly, he stood there in the blackness, waiting. Holding his breath.

"Earthman!" the voice called softly. "Are you there?"

"Yes. Who are you, and where?"

"I am Nina—a friend. Stay where you are, Earthman. I will come to you."

Who was this woman whose soft footsteps padded over the stones, drawing near? If a Martian, she had learned English perfectly. It was not with the broken, halting speech of Neet she spoke, but with carefully modulated, cultured accents. A youthful voice, vibrant.

Whether to expect a knife thrust out of the darkness, or whether this was a genuine act of friendliness, Ford was uncertain. He could hear the girl's breathing now; she was feeling her way carefully along the ledge. And he crouched alert, tense.

"Speak to me." The low whisper was almost in his ear. "Let me hear your voice, so I will know where you are."

"I'm here, not three feet away." He ran his fingers over the damp stone in the direction of the voice; encountered a small warm hand stretching toward him.

"Ah-h!" the girl sighed tremulously. "Thanks be to the gods, I have found you, Earthman!" Her soft fingers clutched his own.

Ford thrilled unaccountably at the contact. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Why are you here, in this hell-hole? Why was I set upon by the robot and flung—"

"Sh! Not so loud. And not so fast. I am Nina, of Square House. I learned of what happened to you. There are evil forces of which I may not speak—it is forbidden. But I shall lead you to safety, Earthman."

"Thanks"—dryly. "It seems Owen and I are unwelcome visitors, to some one."

The girl's fingers were pulling at him, gently impatient.

"It is very good of you, Nina. May I call you that?" He was stumbling after her in his blindness, clinging to her firm slender hand.

"Why not? I am Nina. And who are you, Earthman?" There was unaffected candor in the low voice; natural curiosity.

"I'm Ford Matthews, late of New York and Westchester." He tried to be flippant, but his heart pounded.

"Ford—Matthews! Brother of Paul?" The girl's fingers went limp in his hand, then tightened.

"Yes."

"He knows?" The voice of this Nina was faint and incredulous.

"I told him. Within two minutes that cursed iron man had dumped me down here." Ford's ire was rising. Queer doings in this place, and an undertone of intrigue he didn't like.

"Oh, oh!" the girl was moaning softly. "This is awful!"

Another of those ghastly shrieks echoed in the vast arches of the cavern. A second lightning flash. Ford jerked his head around and saw her sharply outlined against the dripping wall in the brief glare. Dazzling in her wild beauty. A slim figure, shrinking from the light, clad only in a closely fitted swimming-garment. A halo of glorious hair, flashing golden in the swift light. The wide eyes of a frightened child. Parted, trembling lips.

"You're beautiful!" he gasped.

Darkness swallowed her up. There was no response; only a shuddering intake of her breath. Soft fingers fluttered in his grasp.

"**Q**UICK—this way!" the girl was whispering. Tugging with sudden vigor. "In here!"

He saw a dim light and ducked into a low passage after her.

A blue-green flickering came from the walls of the tunnel, giving sufficient light to show the footing.

The girl ran swiftly, and Ford followed on her heels. She was a dim, wraithlike Diana leading him he knew not where. The phosphorescence intensified before them, and she drew close to his side once more, lagging in her steps.

"One of the radium pits!" she explained. "We must be very careful."

Hand in hand again, like two children, they wormed their way out of the constricted mouth of the tunnel onto a narrow shelf circling the inner wall of the green-lit pit. There was a boiling horror down there, a hundred feet below them. A swirling mass of liquid light that sputtered, hissing as thick bubbles gathered and burst, shooting ghastly tongues of sulphurous flame licking upward from the surface.

They hugged the wall and edged along the shelf toward an opening that yawned black on the opposite side. One false step of either and they would have been hurled into the horrid living fire of the pit whose rank odors seared their nostrils, whose weird radiations made awful purple splotches of their flesh and filled the air with tiny charges of energy that scintillated before their eyes.

A gasp came from Nina, and then a pitiful moan. Ford saw that she had cast her eyes into the depths of the pit. Her fingers clutched at him desperately. He followed her gaze.

"What is it?" he yelled.

Then he saw. A shriveled, hairless, ape-figure was crawling laboriously upward from the depths, clinging to ledges and crevices in the wall of the pit. Long arms reached out and pawed blindly for hand-holds. The misshapen body gleamed with a horrible metallic



luster. Deep black hollows for eyes in the flattened, featureless face. Sightless! Writhing lips of a yellow-fanged mouth. A gruesome creature that had once been a man.

Nina stifled a scream, and covered her eyes. She was trembling. Shaken with horror, Ford vainly tried to soothe her.

"It's he!" Nina sobbed. "I know it's he!"

Then like a frightened gazelle she was off down the passage. It was all he could do to keep pace with her. The tunnel was lighted dimly with the golden glow of regularly spaced disks set in the wall. It must be they were nearing the entrance of Square House.

Two Martians hove into view as he turned a corner.

The girl flung herself, shrieking, in their ready arms.

"Zan! Misor!" she cried. "Take me inside! See that the Earthman is brought through— Oh! I saw him!"

She collapsed, moaning.

"YOU wear this," one of the dwarf-men was saying. He held a black cap of closely woven material in one hand.

"You wish to blindfold me?" Ford raged.

"Yes. Bahspahl command," the Martian intoned smoothly.

"Please put it on, Ford!" Nina begged, arousing. Those wide, dark eyes beseeched him. Tears trembled on the long lashes. What was a man to do?

He walked endlessly in the darkness of the black cap, with a Martian hand clinging to his arm. Up countless stairs. Dank, musty odors pungently assailing his nostrils. The opening and closing of many doors. And then a breath of air, perfumed air. The cap

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was whisked from his head and he stood there blinking in the soft light of a lady's boudoir.

Paul was there, and the woman. Nina, the two Martians. Owen—stretched moveless on a low divan.

Paul was bellowing. He gripped the shoulders of the girl Nina fiercely.

"How many times have I forbidden you to enter the diggings?" he demanded. "If it happens again, I'll—"

"Paul!" Ford raised his voice angrily. "You're hurting the girl. She was only—"

"Silence! Brother or no brother, I'm ruler here! I'll manage my own household."

Nina had scurried from the room. Ford faced Paul defiantly, his eyes almost on a level with the pale blue ones that pierced him.

"A rotten household!" Ford grated. "With your murderous robots and heaven only knows what monsters living down below. What ails Owen?"

He went to the scientist's side. Feeling for his pulse, raising his lids. A great welt extended across his friend's forehead and ugly bruises showed at his throat. But the pulse was regular and his breathing steady. Knocked out, that was all—he'd be coming around in a few minutes.

But Ford was furiously angry. He jumped to his feet, snarling:

"More work of your iron killers! What does it all mean—what I saw below; the blindfolding? Answer me!"

The woman had risen with a smile, ready to greet Ford in drawing-room manner, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. At his outburst she sobered, her eyes wary and lithe body tensed like a cat's.

The big man clenched a huge fist, then dropped it to his side. His scowl gave way to a haggard, beaten look.

"I can't tell you," he growled. "Listen, Ford: nobody invited you, here. You have no rights. You'll have to take things as they are. Certain affairs you must not know. I say hands off—get it?"

A glance passed between Paul and the woman. Ford thought he saw swift triumph in her eyes. He felt his hands clenching. If he could only get to the bottom of this hidden tragedy!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STOLEN RAIN.

**L**ATE the following morning Ford met Owen in the comfortable library of the suite assigned to them. They had slept long, exhausted as they were. Though both were stiff and sore, they were much refreshed, almost encouraged. Suddenly Owen asked:

"What do you think of Carlotta Matthews?"

"Can't make her out," the younger man replied. "Whether she's just one of those intense, capricious creatures or a she-devil."

"Nor I. The woman is madly in love with Paul, but still I don't trust her. She's a good nurse, though, I'll say that." The scientist screwed up his eyes comically from under the bandage she had placed over his wound.

"H'm! I saw she was very gentle with you, and you didn't seem to mind a bit." Ford chuckled.

"You weren't backward with little Nina," his friend retorted.

Ford caught his breath. The girl had got under his skin. Then, startled, his gaze turned to the broad window that faced out on the Square. It had darkened suddenly outside and torren-

tial rains were sweeping across the pane.

"Look, Owen! They've started the projector. We must do something about it—at once!"

"Yes"—dryly. "We must speak to Paul. Perhaps he will shut it off."

"Tell you what, Owen; we'll get the visiphone and show him. Let him see and hear what's happening on Earth. For all his gruffness and his secrets, he has a heart—"

"Bahspahl send for you," a Martian voice interrupted from the door. The servant Paul had turned over to them stood there smiling.

"All right, Quin."

Ford chuckled when the little fellow had bowed himself out.

"Makes me think of an Irish office boy of mine—name, grin and all."

He sobered then, and glanced out at the dark downpour with a shudder. His thought of the cheerful Irish kid turned to agony as he realized what a hell of terror the blood-red drought was now making on Earth; what gruesome horrors his friends and his loved ones were suffering. Gangs must be roaming the streets, stealing what little water there was, looting and killing. Cities burning, without the water to put them out. Mobs of fanatics storming the government, hanging, lynching, howling with insane glee, trampling the weak under foot. He could imagine the wails of stricken women, men and children, as humanity saw its precious water supply vanishing.

**B**OSS PAUL was in a bitter mood when he met them in the big room.

"Good morning," he said, but there was little cordiality in his tone.

They returned his salutation.

"Good breakfast?"

"Except for the blue melon," Owen

objected, with a wry face. Paul scowled. It was not an encouraging start.

"You agreed to consider shutting off the main machine," Ford said.

"I did, though I doubt if what you say will change my plans."

Ford turned to the scientist. "Will you rig up the visiphone, Owen?"

"Yes. If there's an umbrella—"

"Quin can go with you," growled Paul.

Ford had been examining the floor where the trap-door had opened. There was not the slightest evidence of its existence. He looked at his brother long and earnestly, remembering that night when the great rocket had screamed into the skies.

"Paul," he said, "why don't you drop this rain idea and return to Earth with us? You can bring Carlotta and Nina. Let the Martians shift for themselves."

Paul's eyes held a far-away look for a moment, then flared defiance.

"No! You don't understand; you never will. The Runds—that's what the Martians call themselves; we called them 'runts' when we first came—are a helpless people. We belong to them. We never hoped to leave Mars, as the explosive required by the rocket ship couldn't be duplicated here, so we made ourselves part of their lives. Their problems are ours. If they do not have this water they will die off in less than five Tironian years. They must have it at any cost."

"There is no other way of obtaining it?"

"None."

"But there are other planets."

"I've tried them. None of those having water will yield it but Earth. I don't believe it will be as serious for them as you think; I'll leave some."

Paul's voice had a cold ring to it that made Ford shiver. For he knew that even with a small part of Earth's water stolen, the thing meant untold disaster.

"How many of these Runds are there?" he asked, trying a new tack.

"About two million. They are scattered over a few thousand square miles along the equator. The rest of the planet is dead—parched and lifeless. We circled it for many days before we landed, looking for signs of habitation."

"And for only two millions of the odd gnome-folk you'd sacrifice many times that number of your own kind—hundreds of millions, maybe? I'll admit the Runds are likable; pathetic in their downfall from the ancient glory and might of their ancestors, but—"

"That's enough! There are other reasons."

The Boss rose, jerkily. His eyes were haunted now, staring into the depths of that dread secret which seemed to be with him always.

○ WEN entered, shivering, and shaking the water from his eyes.

He set the visiphone on the table with a triumphant gesture.

In rapid technical language he gave Paul the story of this marvelous development of television that had come since the rocket left Earth. Told of the Newscasters, who delved into and spread afar all secrets of this latter-day world of theirs. Of their great central transmitters which could span these millions of miles of empty space. And the Boss listened absorbedly.

"Let's see it work," he demanded.

"—while from Kansas come the reports that the wheat crop is utterly blasted." The voice of the announcer was panicky. "An exceptionally large crop was in prospect for this year; now

it seems there will be none. The rich fields are—but wait; here is an image flash from Wanaque Reservoir in northern New Jersey.”

The announcer’s visage faded from view and his voice broke off. Ford’s throat tightened with homesickness. Paul’s face was a mask.

A second announcer took over the newscast. On the disk was pictured a great wall of concrete and a broad expanse of red-lit waters. The angle of the view was such that they saw the sun low on Earth’s horizon, a vast globe of smoldering fire. Crimson! The color of blood.

“You will observe there is no water spilling over the dam,” came the eerie voice from out the vastness of space. “Already the level has dropped more than two feet under the dire influence of this red curse that has come to our world. And to-day the rate of evaporation is even more rapid—”

“Evaporation!” Paul snorted.

Owen was watching him keenly. He must learn the secret of this pilferage of Earth’s water. True, there had been no evaporation.

The scene changed. International Newcasts were providing an aerial survey for their patrons. A transmitter was being carried over certain badly affected sections of the middle west.

The voice of the announcer droned on as they passed over a rolling countryside. “That tiny trickle at your right was a sizable river two days ago. It was fed by many smaller streams that now are entirely dried up. That pond—there, you see, directly ahead—was a lake. Observe the whitening cracks in the caked mud surrounding the shrinking pool. The livestock you see wandering aimlessly over the fields are searching for water. Ranches are being deserted by their owners, who

have fled to the cities, especially around the Great Lakes.”

Ford noticed that Paul’s fingers tapped the table casually. He was bored, or else he was thinking deeply. His bearded face, alight from flickering reflections of the disk, was immovable.

“NOW we turn you over to the news center in Washington,” the voice droned on. “Official warning is given that the militia and the police will not tolerate gatherings in the public places. Martial law has been declared; and hysterical demonstrations such as those of yesterday are not to be permitted. Citizens are further cautioned against indulging in undue excitement over the red twilight. It is safest to remain in your homes and await the passing of this second cosmic cloud. The Naval Observatory reports it much smaller than the first; it is to be passed through quickly. Heavy rains are to be expected late this afternoon east of the Mississippi.”

“Fakers!” Owen scathed. “Why do they keep up this deceit? Fools! They build up public faith, only to destroy it.”

A swelling murmur came from the viewing disk. They saw a crowd storming the portals of a great public building—the Capitol.

“As if Congress could do anything about it!” Owen said bitterly.

Shots rang out. There were desperate men in that mob, unreasoning and fear-crazed.

A stentorian voice was calling for them to disperse. They saw a machine gun crew crouched along the wall. More shots and little puffs of white dust spurting from the wall near the khaki-clad gunners. One of the sol-

diers, a young boy—they could see his smooth cheeks plainly—rose clutching at his throat, amazed disbelief written in his agonized countenance. Then he toppled amongst his fellows.

The hideous stuttering of machine guns. Frantic screams from the mob. Bodies piling there; wounded men and women crawling over them, whimpering. The pavement slippery with blood. And the red twilight brooding darkly over all.

"Enough!" Paul shuddered. "Turn it off. I don't want to see such things. Turn it off, I say."

There was a click and the disk became dark.

"COME," said Paul, and he strode from the room.

Ford and Owen followed, still breathing hard. It had been a terrible thing to see their fellow men wallowing in their own blood, vainly spilling it in frantic conflict with the inevitable.

They came out on a balcony overlooking the Square of Thren-dis. The heavens had opened to spout forth such a deluge as had not come to the planet Mars in a thousand centuries. The great plaza was a wading pool where hundreds of half-naked Rund children splashed and cavorted in their glee. Their elders watched them from the sidelines, and on every round face was a happy smile. Little they cared that their clothing was soaked; that their feet were in water to the ankles. It was their salvation, this miraculous rain the Bahspahl had brought to them. Tiron was to have a new lease of life. Once more it would bloom with sweet flowers.

"Another story, you see," Paul said solemnly.

"But see here!" Owen cried in panic

at seeing how moved the big man was by the Martians' joy. "There must be some other way. Shut off this ray generator of yours, and I'll work out some other way of getting water."

"You've never done it, have you?" Paul demanded gruffly. "Disintegrated the atom?"

"Yes—the fuel of my space ship. Let me—"

The big man broke in with a short laugh.

"Fuel! That's nothing! I could do that five years ago—simple disintegration. The man who discovered that for me—he's a Rund—has tried everything. Lives with his books and calculations. There's only one way to get water on Mars—"

"Listen to me!" said Owen crisply. "I don't care what you've tried. You may have overlooked the simplest way. You don't want to change the climate all at once, anyhow—the Runds would die. They aren't used to it. Turn off the machine for ten days, and I'll have water for you—I swear it!"

Paul turned away impatiently and gazed across the dripping Square for several minutes. Then he growled, as though he was ready to hate these Earthmen for interfering with his plans:

"You're right so far—the Runds couldn't stand a rainy climate suddenly. Take the ten days. That's long enough for you to learn how tough this water proposition is."

He strode to a visiphone cube near the door of the balcony and gave curt orders to the men running the ray projector up on the mesa.

Nina was there; she'd been watching them from inside. Her fresh young beauty smote Ford anew. He moved to her side, the hot blood mounting to his temples.



But the girl was listening to Paul where he spoke rapidly into the black cube. And a look of horror crept over her cameo-like features as the words rattled forth.

"No, no!" she moaned when he had finished. "You can't cut off this beautiful rain! The Runds—they will suffer again."

"Hush, Nina! They can't stand much water. They aren't used to it." The big man of Thren-dis looked down on her with amused tolerance.

"But the ray machine may not work next time! You've been trying for this rain ever since I can remember. And now when you have it you listen to these Earthmen and shut it off!"

She turned from him, bending her tearful gaze on Ford.

"Oh, why did you come here? Why have you used influence on him?"

Weeping, she ran from the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TEN DAYS OF HOPE.

**W**ITH Owen spending every waking hour in the laboratory of Square House, or out in the huge workshop on the mesa of the rain machine, Ford was left with much time on his hands.

But it did not drag. The girl Nina had taken him in tow, no longer rebellious that the rain had been shut off. She was a Martian, however, born and brought up among the Runds; as much one of them as if her sympathetic spirit had been housed in a gnome-body. She could not see why the people of Earth were more deserving of the benefits of the rain than they.

Ford explained patiently, telling her of the seriousness of the situation in his own land, the land of her father

and mother. He pictured vividly the things he had seen; tried to tell her of the vast numbers of the Earth folk, of their lives and ambitions. But his people did not impress her as particularly admirable. To her they seemed foolish in the face of a dangerous drought. The Runds had fought the same battle bravely. She was resigned to the action of her stepfather only on the basis of his ten-day promise.

Carlotta, he found to his surprise, treated him with the utmost respect and with friendly overtures that certainly were sincere. And she was more than tolerant of his growing friendship with the daughter.

They spent many hours, he and Nina, rambling in the streets and public places of Thren-dis. She took him into the homes of many gnomes and proudly exhibited him to her friends. To them, it was apparent, she was a goddess, to be adored along with the ancient gods of their ancestors. She had interceded at Square House for many of them in the past. She was the guardian angel of Thren-dis and of all Tiron.

Ford managed to pick up a few words of the queer language of the Runds. At the end of the fifth day he found that he was enjoying himself hugely. And, strangely, his heart went out to these gnome-folk who were beloved of Nina.

There was a wheezing and rattly old automobile, built years ago by engineers out of parts taken from the rocket, and used in a vain search over a large part of Mars for certain chemicals. Carefully built, it was still in fair shape. As Owen and Paul were using the space ship in their frequent visits to the mesa, the "fire chariot" was at the service of Ford and Nina. Carlotta refused to be budged from

her comfortable quarters in Square House, but the young couple made numerous trips over the hard-packed sands of the drylands and along the canal banks in the bouncing old car.

On one of these excursions they stopped beside an ancient canal-lock whose crumbling ruins had become a favorite spot from which to view the sunset. Ford had not got over the wonder of these iridescent purple sunsets of Tiron.

"You love all this, don't you, Nina?" he asked, when they had rested in silence for many minutes.

"It is my life. Of course I love it. I should die if I were to leave it."

"You would not care to visit Earth?" Ford was contemplating the smooth-whiteness of her throat as he asked the question. He saw the muscles tense under the velvet skin.

"I'd hate it. There's wickedness on Earth. And avarice; greed that destroys. My own father—" The girl bit her lips and the color went from her face. She stared off over the drylands.

"Go on," Ford said gently.

"No." Her voice was choked but determined. "It is forbidden. I must say no more. Shall we return to Square House?"

Nina was moodily silent throughout the drive homeward.

PAUL and Owen joined them for dinner that night, something they had not done for several days. Both were gloomy and preoccupied.

"Any luck?" Ford inquired of his friend.

"None thus far. But I still have hopes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic."

"It's the Runds, Ford. Their staring

eyes and bleached skins. They look at me out there, the workmen, as if I were robbing them of their hope of continued life. And it is so. The drylands are now as terrifying as before; the canals are parched."

"You two mustn't be talking shop," Carlotta reproved them from the head of the table.

She smiled in the approved manner of a hostess of Earth.

"Your pardon," Owen said politely.

Nina spoke up with some small talk of the gnome-folk.

It was all so like a similar scene back home that Ford sat staring with his fork poised in mid-air. Were it not for the silent and efficient Runds who served the Martian vegetable courses, he might have thought he was dining with friends in Larchmont or New Rochelle. To think that the fate of worlds lay in the hands of two men at this table; that horror and dark mystery stalked in the sub-surface realm beneath them was mad imagining.

And then the lights were extinguished. An explosive grunt from Paul; Nina's low, startled cry. But not a sound from Carlotta.

"Keep your seats!" Paul commanded.

They heard Paul's chair flung violently on its back; his heavy steps as he blundered through the darkness, followed by soft, rustling sounds.

"Let me go with you!" Ford pleaded, rising precipitately. His plate clattered to the floor, making a hideous racket as it fell.

"Ford, better take it easy," Owen said calmly.

"Devil take him!" Ford snarled. "For two cents I'd—"

"You'd do nothing of the sort. Sit down." Owen was unmoved.

"Nina!" Ford whispered.

Still no reply. The others must have gone with him.

"Well, this is the damndest place I've ever seen!" Ford growled. He felt for his chair and slumped to its padded seat.

"I agree with you," Owen whispered. "Ford, there must be human beings down there in the diggings. Prisoners or slaves—victims of Paul's love for his Martian people, perhaps, or madmen."

"You mean—"

"Some of those who came in the rocket ship! How else could all these mysterious things happen? One of them with a robot-control must have sent the mechanical men to kill us. I'm sure it wasn't Paul."

"Then they are enemies of Paul and of us?"

"Exactly."

Ford's mind was in a whirl. Was Paul keeping some of the survivors of that expedition out of sight for a purpose? Or had they willingly leagued themselves with other monsters who dwelt in those fearsome diggings?

The diffused light of walls and ceiling flickered on now, dimly. Steadied to normal brilliance. The other places at the table were empty, as Ford had guessed.

"At any rate," he said after a silence, "Paul seems to have the upper hand, and the confidence of the Runds. They worship him!"

"They should," Owen returned feelingly. "He has educated them, taught them the forgotten arts of their ancestors, made scientists of some."

"Yes, and they bear out his story of the deaths of the others. But they are reticent, at that. The last, they say, died soon after the completion of Square House, when Thren-dis was

still in construction. What a strange state of affairs!"

Paul entered the room, smiling, with the ladies on his arms. As if nothing had happened. But there was a certain shiftiness in his manner, and Carlotta's long lashes veiled her expressive eyes. Nina was ghastly white.

"Just a little trouble with the generators, Owen," Paul blustered, obviously trying to conceal his agitation. "Come ahead, we must get back on the job. You can do without the last course, can't you?"

"Surely." Owen was on his feet, moving with alacrity to follow.

**E**IGHT of the ten days for Owen's experiment had passed when next Ford had opportunity of talking with the scientist alone. The older man was tired and drawn.

"Nothing doing yet," he sighed in response to Ford's anxious query. "It is very elusive, what we are trying to do. Worse, it would seem, than my gravity-wave."

"Think you'll do it by the tenth day?"

"It looks dubious. I'll say this, though: that brother of yours is a worker. He's wearing me ragged. Knows a thing or two, besides."

"Just as anxious as we are, isn't he?" Ford was commencing to feel much of his old admiration for Paul. He had changed greatly, of course, and there was this grim secret of the diggings. But Paul had been through many trials in these twenty years.

"Anxious or not," Owen warned, "he'll stick to his ultimatum of the tenth day."

Ford had been sure of that. Conditions in the Rund villages were growing steadily worse. And then Paul was the sort of man who did what he

said he would, there was no balking him.

He followed Owen into his bedroom, where the older man disrobed slowly, with fingers that fumbled.

"Do you know, Ford," he was saying drowsily, "I wish some one else from our world had this job. Some of the smart Alecks who know so much about everything. They'd have something to think about."

Ford grinned affectionately. Owen had crawled between the silken sheets. His lids were leaden. Still his old animosities were strong within him.

"Besides," the scientist continued, "I haven't as much heart in it as I had. The Runds—hate to see them get it in the neck, the poor devils . . ."

Owen Wardell was asleep. Ford slipped quietly from the room.

**M**ORNING dawned clear and without a breeze, as did every morning under normal conditions on the dying planet. Owen already had left when Ford awakened. Dressing hurriedly, Ford stepped out on the balcony that faced the Square. His pulses quickened. He knew he would meet Nina, and somehow that early meeting each day was becoming a momentous occasion.

He had never thought a mere girl could set his pulses throbbing this way. None of those he had met on Earth had affected him like this. Confound it, he was falling in love!

Sitting by the usual embrasure, he saw her. A spot of vivid color in the drab surroundings and a figure of ineffable grace, she sat there with chin cupped in her hands looking out over the Square toward the platform which had been built for the space ship. The Martian sunrise made liquid fire of her red-gold hair.

"Nina!" he whispered.

She looked up at him with shining eyes.

"Ford!"

She moved aside, making room for him on the bench.

"You seem very happy this morning," he said.

"I am. To-morrow is the last day my people must suffer. On the day following it will rain."

"Oh!" Ford fell silent. That was depressing.

"Only think," she went on; "if Paul has not miscalculated, we shall have our canals well filled in forty days. The reservoirs, and all. There will be enough, he says, to restore normal conditions for more than a century. The reds and blues of the hills will return. New vegetation will spring up—everything will be as it was in ages past."

"You've never seen green fields, green hills?" Ford's gaze was far off in the heavens; his heart suddenly heavy.

"No! Green?" Nina was wide-eyed, incredulous.

"Yes, on Earth they are green. At least, they were, before this thing we call the red twilight. Now, if Paul and Owen fail—"

"Oh, Ford, I'm sorry!" Nina's soft fingers twined in his. "I believe I know how you feel— Like I do about my own land here. Only with me it is more real, the disaster we hope to avoid. It has been threatening so long. And now there is hope. You see, don't you?"

Ford could not answer. Their viewpoints diverged widely. He looked out into the emerald sky at the tiny pinpoint of light that was his own world. Visible still by reason of the rare atmosphere, it was unthinkably remote.

Helpless in the hands of the fate that hung now by so slender a thread.

For the first time since they left Earth he despaired, utterly.

## CHAPTER X.

### ZERO HOUR.

LATE the following night Ford paced the floor of Owen's room, awaiting news of the experiment. The final hour of the time allowed by his brother had arrived, and still there was no word from the workshop on the mesa. Ford had tried the radiophone in vain; the black cubes did not respond. In his heart he knew Owen had failed.

On the morrow rain would come again to Tiron. And on Earth the red twilight once more would take its toll. Day after day the thing would go on until—but his mind refused to picture the final death-struggle of humanity.

Nine and Carlotta had retired. They had been careful to avoid the subject that evening. Yet he well knew they rejoiced inwardly that the rains were to come within so very few hours. Rain was so sadly needed in the farm lands surrounding Thren-dis and in the almost empty canals and reservoirs of Tiron. Were Owen to discover a way out, the two would have acclaimed it gladly. But serious consideration of his own world was not in their thoughts. Knowing what he did of the past twenty years, he could scarcely blame them.

Yet Ford was a man of Earth. Though he never gave thought to the matter before the coming of the red twilight, he knew now that his own land meant more to him than life itself. Its peaceful valleys and majestic heights. The swift rivers; mirrorlike

lakes. Even the cities. Humankind. Weak and frivolous, but his own.

There had been moments of the past few days when, under the spell of Nina's eyes, he had been willing to forget—had forgotten. For the love of women much less desirable, strong men had overthrown kingdoms of Earth; sent thousands of their fellow men to their deaths. Might not he, and without censure, renounce his Earth ties and remain here? Win Nina as his own. Forget.

Resolutely Ford put Nina from his thoughts.

He tried to put himself in Paul's place, remembering him as the reckless youth of twenty years ago. Remembering, too, what he had seen here and what had been told him of the succeeding years.

Those rash adventurers had found Mars a dying planet, barren and arid, but peopled with friendly and lovable folk. Unable to leave, they had set about making homes for themselves and improving conditions for the natives.

They had taken apart the big rocket ship and used its mechanisms; the machine tools of its repair shop. They had contrived robots which they could control by radioed voice impulses. These were for the heavier and more dangerous tasks. The Runds assisted them in the more delicate work, proving themselves most willing and apt pupils in the knowledge and science of Earth. Square House rose up; and Thren-dis.

Many of Paul's companions had died. Here there was uncertainty and conflicting report. But Paul lived on, a mighty figure.

There was Carlotta Best, widowed and with an infant daughter. A fascinating and beautiful woman. These



two were the sole adults of their kind in the land. Mated by Rund law, they gradually forgot their former lives on Earth; transferred their allegiance to the adopted home. They were truly Martians.

At once they had found that water was scarce. The ancient pumps which supplied the canals and irrigating ditches drew less and less from the sub-surface sources on which the Rund had relied for many generations. All were faced with extinction.

Deeply concerned, Rund leaders had consulted Bahspahl.

Paul then set about his experiments, and discovered a force that would disrupt the atoms, separating the protons and electrons of hydrogen and oxygen that comprised water. These subatomic energy charges could be reassembled, and the water restored. The force could be carried over a beam of ether vibrations.

Terrible as the effect of the rays had been on Earth, however, Ford had to admit that if he were in Paul's place he would have done the same. Nothing could have made him give up the plan.

**O**WEN returned, a haggard wreck of his former self. Paul was with him.

"You've failed!" Ford knew what the answer would be.

Paul nodded, while Owen flung his lean length across the bed. Not unkindly Paul said:

"It was too much to expect." He strolled to the window and looked vacantly into the Square. "We have attempted the impossible, Ford. To produce water, combining two atoms of hydrogen with one of oxygen is possible. A laboratory experiment, accompanied by an explosion, in which only a few droplets of the precious

liquid are formed. On the large scale we require—it's impossible! And my beam is of no avail except in the way it is used."

"The red twilight must come to Earth again?"

"To-morrow." Paul had not turned his head from the window. And Owen stretched there silent; he was incapable of speech.

Ford gulped. "Give it another trial, Paul!" he begged. "A few more days. There has to be a way!"

"I can't do it." His face was immovable as stone. "In the outlying provinces there is suffering even now. Several villages in the Zin-tar district have been abandoned. My Rund, patient and trustful though they be, are complaining. A delegation visited me to-day. I can not explain to them."

"Paul!" Ford was desperate. "You owe these people nothing! They were doomed before you came. Come back with us in the space ship. Bring Carlotta and Nina. Destroy the rain machine before we leave. Let them work out their own salvation."

Owen had raised himself to sit cross-legged on the bed. He regarded his young friend with amazement, expecting an outburst from Paul.

But Paul was thoughtful now.

"I might persuade Carlotta," he answered, "but I'm afraid of Nina. She'd refuse, and if I tried force she'd lose herself in the diggings. Carlotta then would—well, both of them would be lost to me. There are other reasons."

And Nina would be lost to Ford. He groaned at the thought.

"Owen!" Ford asked, abandoning the first line of attack, "could you solve the water problem if you had more time?"

"There is a chance, of course." Owen was not hopeful.

"Paul—give him that chance!" Ford was grasping at straws. "You can hold off the Runds; they've waited all these years. What difference will a few days make to them? How great a difference to Earth—"

He was interrupted by the screeching of many voices in the Square. Loud cries of alarm rose suddenly; voices calling out to Bahspahl, to the gods of ancient Tiron.

"Look!" Paul shouted, drawing aside the curtain. "Your ship, Owen; there must be fire inside!"

The space ship, its fifty foot height of curved steel hull plate glowing red hot, swayed there on its platform in the Square. Excited Runds were rushing into the area from the side streets, swarming over the pavements so recently deserted, gathering in huddled groups to view with superstitious awe this amazing phenomenon.

With a choked cry Owen bounded to his feet and streaked from the room. Ford and Paul clattered down the broad stairs after him.

**N**O fire from within heated the hull of the space ship, but a blast of radiant energy from beneath. They saw its blue streamers crackling from the pavement underneath the platform.

Shrieking, the Runds fell back as the shell of the craft heated to dazzling whiteness.

Rooted to the spot, Ford watched, speechless, as the space ship collapsed and melted away. Little rivulets of its sparkling liquid metal spread over the pavement, sending forth tongues of blue-white flame in their wake.

Paul was struggling with Owen, dragging the maddened scientist out from the zone of danger. A section of the pavement sagged, and blobs of

flowing metal dripped through. The intense light died down and all that remained of the vessel in which Owen and Ford had spanned the heavens was a thickening mass of glowing fused material.

"Those devils from the underground—they've done this!" Owen babbled. "They've sent out a raiding party... We're trapped on Mars now! Doomed to remain—shut off from our own world—"

Paul was laughing, a hideous sound in the Martian night. A maniacal light was in his eyes. Shaking Owen, he was, thrusting forward his bearded jaw; yelling in the drawn white face of the other.

"Shut off, eh? I'll say you are! Like we were twenty years ago. You'll know now what it's like. You'll do as I did, Owen Wardell, and you'll come to the same conclusion. We'll see now, Owen, whether the welfare of Earth is more important than your own. Self-preservation, you know, is man's primal urge."

"Paul!" Ford laid a hand on his arm, wrenched free his grip on the shaken scientist.

The big man of Square House subsided. Then he had broken away from them; he was back there among the Runds, his great voice rolling out over the Square as he endeavored to quiet them. Telling them the danger was past; asking them to return to their homes. Promising rain for the morrow.

**A**WAKENED by the uproar outside, Nina and Carlotta had come out on the balcony of Square House. Ford saw the feral glitter in the older woman's eyes when she drew Paul aside, clinging to him in an agony of apprehension.

"Don't go down into the diggings!" she was moaning. "Paul, promise me you won't go down!"

A vivid memory of that metallic, ape-like figure clinging to the side of the radium pit flashed before Ford's eyes. He shivered.

"Ford!" Nina was at his side, more alluring than ever in the dim light from the Square. Her slim body enfolded in a shimmering negligee. "Please don't take it too hard. It is fate; a thing you must feel is for the best. Tiron welcomes you with open arms. You will be happy here."

Mechanically, Ford nodded. The awful significance of the calamity had not struck him in its full force yet. He was dazed.

But the wide eyes looked up at him, pitying and beseeching. The fragrance of her tumbled hair was in his nostrils. Swiftly he folded her in his arms, drew her close. Kissed her upturned, yielding lips. Lost himself in the wondering knowledge that his feeling for her was reciprocated. Time stood still.

A long while after, he gripped the balcony rail and stared off into the night. The others had gone in. Owen, his narrow shoulders drooping. Paul and Carlotta whispering, excited. Nina, suddenly abashed and self-conscious, had slipped from his arms and was away on twinkling feet.

He was alone, and the hideous truth smote him with staggering force. The breath-taking wonder of this love that had come to him was submerged in his thoughts of Earth. To-morrow the red twilight would return.

Never again to feast his eyes on the beauties of Earth's forests and fields. Never to battle the surf on a wind-whipped shore; to breathe in the salt tang of an ocean breeze. To be a part of the bustling life of Earth; to throw himself whole-heartedly into her whirlpool of social and business activity.

Yet Ford could not down the idea that somewhere there was still a solution. To save humanity now would mean an almost hopeless battle, but he would never give up.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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### *Bulldog Vampires*

**A**T an elevation of ten thousand feet in Peru vampire bats of great size and resembling bulldogs are numerous. The resemblance is because of the bat's undershot jaw, cropped ears, and broad muzzle. Its legs are well developed and heavy, enabling it move on the ground with the true bulldog waddle.

In the bulldog vampire the gullet is restricted and only fluid can enter the stomach. They are the terror of farmers because they attack late at night while most persons are asleep, their victims being cattle, horses, mules, and donkeys. They are particularly hard to see because their flight is low, and close to the earth.

Vampires of this type have teeth only fitted for incisions and none for grinding. For this reason they must find blood. Many stories of humans being attacked by vampires are rife in Peru. But none of them seem to be well authenticated.

*Charles Adams.*