

THE NIGHT

PEOPLE



By FRANCIS FLAGG

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FEW THINGS are more astounding than that which occurred on lower Washington street, Oakland, California, one summer's afternoon at two o'clock. The incredible details were in the San Francisco *Examiner*.

"Escaped murderer captured," read the lurid headlines, and underneath ran the following: "Joseph Smith, who last month made a sensational escape from the condemned cell at San Quentin, was identified today in the person of the naked man injured by a truck yesterday and taken to Fabiola Hospital suffering from concussion and a broken arm and ribs. How Smith managed to appear naked in Washington street, at the height of the afternoon traffic, without attracting attention until run down, is as yet unknown. Alfred Levy, the truck driver, declares that he never saw Smith until just before the truck struck him . . . Smith is heavily guarded at Fabiola and will be removed to San Quentin as soon as possible. Since regaining consciousness he has refused to speak, and the wherefor of his nakedness and how he reached Washington street is still shrouded in mystery."

So much for the newspaper item. But behind the silence of Smith lies a story, a story so strange and bizarre as to be almost unbelievable. This is that story.

Smith was due to die. In a moment of ungovernable rage he had killed the man who had wronged his sister,

and the law being what it is, and the man the relative of politically powerful people, his way was smoothed to the gas chamber. But of course he appealed the conviction. He was young and healthy, with the love of life in his heart, and long months of imprisonment made him passionately regret a deed which had remedied nothing and only doomed himself. Now on the evening before his execution, he faced the prison warden with white face, struggling hard for self-possession.

"Sorry, Smith," said the Warden brusksly, "but you've lost your appeal and the governor refuses to intercede." Smith swayed.

"Brace up, man!" mumbled the Warden. He always dreaded those terrible moments when he had to tell a man there was no hope. First you destroyed hope in the man, and then you destroyed the man. Two executions. Smith turned blindly away, fighting an impulse to clutch at his throat. Already he could hear the hiss of the gas. . . . Smith possessed a vivid imagination, and that night he could not sleep and by morning was a trembling wreck. To him came the prison doctor with a draught in a tin cup. This doctor was a tall, spare man in his early forties, with a cold, unemotional face. His name was Stanson. Outside the prison, in the world of medicine and science, he enjoyed a great reputation; but inside the prison walls, by the prisoners, and even some of the guards, he was (because of his indifference and callousness to the sufferings of the men he treated), called "The Brute."

"Here," he said, regarding Smith through narrowed, expressionless eyes, "drink this; it'll do you good."

Smith had heard stories of how they doped men to execute them without fuss; but God! Anything that would

deaden the cold terror at his heart was welcome. Feverishly he drained the cup. The liquid had an unpleasant, metallic taste. The doctor walked away. Smith felt queer. The draught made his heart throb at a terrific rate, his head reeled. Over his flesh ran a tremor, like the shaking of jelly. Sick and giddy he took a step toward the grated door, and then—was he mad, dreaming?—the floor rose, the ceiling fell, the walls of the cell seemed to rush in on him at express speed, fading into gray nothingness as they rushed. He had a momentary illusion of bursting through brazen walls, brown hillsides, the very sky itself, engulfing them as he burst, expanded, and then: vanished was the cell, the grey prison pile on the shores of San Francisco bay, and he was standing naked and bewildered on a sandy plain covered with clumps of short reeds!

Imagine his emotions. Scarcely had he time to realize that the reeds were purple with tufts of scarlet leaves at their tips, that around him the world was dark, as it darkens in an eclipse of the sun, that the sky, the air was sullenly red, when there came charging toward him a troop of strange beasts with spitting mouths and ferociously bared teeth, not unlike, and about the size of, western mountain lions. But the thing that struck fear to his heart was not the sight of these beasts—unnerving though that was—but of the strange riders who perched on their backs, guiding them with bit and bridle as men guide horses. Diminutive they were, like nothing Smith had ever seen or dreamed of in his life; neither insect nor human; perhaps two feet in height; their shell-like skin or armor—he couldn't decide which it was—dully black in color. All this Smith saw in one kaleidoscopic whirl—saw the insect faces with protruding probosces, the blank, many-faceted

eyes—and in the same second turned to flee. But one bare foot came down on a thorn, a naked toe stubbed a yellow stone, and he crashed his full length on the gritty sand. When he sat up, he was in the midst of a circle of snarling, reined-in beasts and weird riders. He stared at them wildly, doubting the evidence of his eyesight. Thought, disconnected, incoherent, leapt through his brain. What place was this? How had he gotten here? He remembered drinking the liquid; after that— Had they executed him while drugged; was he dead and this life after death? He had never believed in life after death. Or rather, only vaguely, as thousands believe. But here he was, he knew not where. One of the weird riders—sitting down he towered over it head and shoulders—rode up and prodded him with a sharp spear and harangued him at length. It was a strange *slithering* language. Smith could only stare stupidly. But some of his wits returned. The creatures were not attempting any immediate harm, and that they were intelligent beings could not be doubted, in view of their definite language and questioning gestures, added to their ability to handle weapons and ride beasts. Smith sought to reply. "Hello," he said. "What place is this? Who are you? What do you want?" He wasn't quite easy in his mind, but still trying to handle the situation. Only his voice boomed too loudly at first and he tried to pitch it to a lower key. Then he sought to act out his words with appropriate gestures, but his arms and hands were so massive compared to the unbelievable creatures astride their cat-like steeds that he quit in despair. Then the being who had harangued him motioned with his spear for Smith to get up and walk in a certain direction. It was useless to resist. He was at the mercy of his strange

captors; besides what else could he do? He might as well go where commanded. He stumbled to his feet, became conscious of thorn in his foot and paused to pull it out.

The sky was dull red, an infinity of redness, and the landscape with its sparse vegetation utterly alien to anything he had ever seen. Walking in his bare feet was an uncomfortable business. When he paused, the riders prodded him with spear-points none too dull, and the half-wild steeds snarled at his heels. Smith stumbled on, his thoughts chaotic. Surely it was a strange situation. They approached what he at first took for low hillocks but which turned out to be the mounds and walls of a city of earth and sand covering many acres of land — a city more below the ground than above it, as he was later to learn. This bizarre city was approached through a countryside of well-tended irrigated fields and gardens, and its narrow streets teemed with active life — the active life, thought Smith involuntarily, of a super ant-heap. Yet this city was more than a super ant-heap; something on a higher scale of existence was implied in its construction; just as its inhabitants were not alone insects, but insects with a human development. For these insects, seemingly a compromise between the human and the ant, had weapons, tools, and crude machines, machines whose functions Smith never quite understood.

Then began for him a queer time indeed. He was conducted to a square in the center of the city where the inhabitants thronged to see him. Food was brought, both vegetable and animal, which after some hesitation he ate sparingly. The water was dull brown, thick like creamy milk, and brackish to the taste. His captors attached thick ropes to his arms and legs and tied him firmly to

pillars of wood erected for the purpose. All this Smith suffered without resistance, for his mind was still in a daze, and if he escaped from the city where else could he go? Worn out, at length he slept; when he awoke it was to confront one of the human insects standing on a hastily erected platform which brought it to a level with his head when he sat. This teacher, for so he proved to be, taught Smith the slithering language. It took a long time—or perhaps the time only seemed long to Smith since he never mastered the human insects' method of reckoning it. Indeed, the time for them seemed to have no especial significance. There was no sun or heavenly body by which to measure the duration of hours and minutes, and the red day persisted without ever a night. But at length communication between himself and teacher was established, at least after a fashion, and he learned that the city in which he sat was called Kola, that the Kolans ruled the surrounding country for many *vars* (whatever that might signify in area), and that beyond their domain were other mighty city empires with which they often warred.

“Once upon a time, *ons* and *ons* ago,” said Smith’s teacher, “legend says that such creatures as yourself ruled in this land. Sometimes we discover their skeletons, and even their preserved bodies, while digging in the sands; but never, until we captured you, have we seen one alive.”

Smith soon learned that he was regarded as a rare specimen, that the scientists of Kola, of which there were many, regarded him and his habits with unabated interest. He on his part told them of the human civilization in which he had been born, lived, and (as he supposed) died. But since he was quite hazy on how he came to be where he

was, and since he was able to understand what was said to him better than he could make himself understood, the Kolans persisted in believing him to be of incredible age, in fact the sole survivor of a human civilization long preceding their own. His docility and evident intelligence soon won their confidence, and after he had convinced them of his unwillingness to escape, they allowed him to wander at will through the city and adjacent countryside, an object of wonder and awe to the tireless workers in the city and fields.

Time hung heavy on idle hands, and at his own request, under the direction of the capable workers, Smith hauled wood and stone and built himself a dwelling. Also he assisted the Kolan workers in their own labors, and in this way penetrated to some of the larger underground buildings, including the Kolan library with its stone and wooden books incised in two characters only (the Kolans had no printing presses). These two characters, according to the manner in which they were written, expressed thousands of different meanings, and while Smith sensed that it was not as efficient or as rich a medium for the expression of thought as is that of printed English, for instance, nonetheless the Kolans possessed a wide and varied literature covering thousands of years in time. But since he never succeeded in mastering the difficulties of the two characters, this literature remained to him a sealed book, though the drawings and paintings exhibited in the art galleries were a source of never-ending pleasure. The Kolans, Smith discovered, were sexless, and, despite the attempts of the learned scientists to explain the mystery, he never understood how it was they perpetuated themselves. The greater part of the underground city, the workshops,

the laboratories, (of which he heard wonderful things), were barred to him because of the smallness of passages through which he could not pass. It is possible, had he been able to reach what the Kolans called the *e-co*, that is the breeding rooms far underground, this mystery might have cleared for him. But he never did.

So *or* succeeded *or* (the Kolans possessed no clocks or watches, or any method of telling time that Smith could understand, but they did have various words indicating, roughly, the duration of certain periods—an *or* comparing to Smith's alternate periods of sleep and activity) and almost imperceptibly he became habituated to his surroundings and to the constant sight of the human insects. The past receded, as the past does recede, but there were times when it was vividly present, when the longing to be once again a man amongst men was almost unbearable. But even those moments tended to become rarer and he had sunk into an apathetic acceptance of things as they were when, awaking from one of his periods of sleep, he discovered the city of Kola in a ferment of excitement and fear. Picking up one of his learned friends he inquired of him what the matter was.

"War!" slithered the Kolan. "Three *tors* ago Kola attacked and laid waste the city of the Ru-lars. Now have the Ru-lars reassembled their strength and made allies of the Toons. Their huge army is within a vir of our walls. We must defend the city as best we can."

"And I will defend it with you," exclaimed Smith.

Always of a sturdy build, his long period of simple living and work had made him hardy and bold. His weapons were a bow and arrows he had fashioned for his own use, and a heavy club studded with spikes. From the tough,

dressed hides of the ilex, a domestic animal bred by the Kolans, he had made himself sandals for his feet and a tough harness for his body.

It was not the Kolans' method to defend the city walls. Instead, mounted on their snarling wildcat steeds, they poured out into the plain to meet the advancing enemy, similarly mounted and accoutered. No finesse was displayed in generalship. The two armies met in headlong collision, and it would have gone badly with that of Kola, outnumbered as it was, if it had not been for Smith. Like a mighty Goliath he towered above the furious combatants. His tough leathern harness protected him from any serious injury, his mighty club — mighty and huge to the Ru-lars and the Toons — rose and fell, visiting them with death and destruction, while his huge bulk and unexpected appearance overwhelmed with dismay and fear.

Yet they fought with desperate fury and twice rolled back the Kolans, and it was only when Smith, from a slight eminence, loosed at them a flight of gigantic arrows, thus slaying their leading warriors, that they turned and fled; for the use of the bow was unknown to them, as it was to the Kolans, and the death-dealing bolts a terrifying thing. After them sped the Kolans, and Smith, exhausted by his prodigious exertions and suffering from a myriad of minor yet painful wounds, staggered back to the city and sank to rest in the great square. Soon his head began to ache, his flesh to throb, and he wondered if the spear-points which had scratched his flesh could have been poisoned. Through his body ran a tremor, like the shaking of jelly, only more pronounced. Sick and giddy he raised his head and saw the victorious army of Kolans returning, herding before them the captives, and carrying

the heads of enemies on triumphantly raised spears. Their slithering cries of rejoicing sounded like distant surf. He heard the name they had given him—Seela, the Mountainous one—chanted by the warriors. Yes, they were coming to acclaim the champion to whom they owed victory, coming to dance before him the dance of highest honor, to lay at his feet the trophies of battle. Yes, they were coming; he stood up to meet them, and then—through his taut body ran a throbbing dissolution as of death itself. His body seemed to expand, grow. The Kolan warriors, the low mounds of buildings rushed forward with express speed, dissolving into mist as they rushed; the whole red world went round in a fiery globe that dwindled into an atom he engulfed; and then out of a black coma he emerged to find himself staring into the dark eyes of an utterly strange but lovely girl!

He was naked, and before the girl ashamed of his nakedness. The rounded earth mounds of the underground city, the Kolans, the red eternal day had passed away—had vanished like a vivid dream. He saw the wide glade in which he stood, the surrounding forest of great trees and twisted growths similar to the forests of earth. But what he could not understand was the fact that the girl had fled to this spot pursued by Bara from whom she had made a recent escape, that unable to flee further she had stretched out her hands in despair and supplicated the help of Mik-el, the god of her people, and that seemingly out of thin air had emerged this naked white giant with ruddy hair and frosty blue eyes. "Save me, O Mik-el!" she cried and fell to her knees.

Now Smith could not understand the language in which the appeal was couched but the gesture was unmistakable.

Besides at that moment came Bara himself charging from the underbrush, dark and swarthy, with close-cropped hair and passionate face, almost as huge in body as Smith himself. "Ho!" he cried in a mighty voice, and snatching from the belt of his short tunic a weapon not unlike a gleaming pistol, levelled it at Smith. "Look out!" screamed the girl. Smith leaped to one side even as something hot and searing swept over the spot where he had stood. Then he hurled himself forward and with a swift lunge knocked the weapon from Bara's hand. Bara charged. Smith sidestepped and his right fist smashed Bara's mouth as he went by. Smith's bewilderment was giving way to a cold, reckless rage, the lust of combat. In the miraculous transition from the city of Kola to the present environment his weariness had left him, his wounds had healed. At any rate he was not conscious of fatigue or hurt. The two men circled each other like huge beasts, snarling with rage, and then they met in a head-on rush. Even as they grappled Smith realized that his enemy was the stronger. To and fro they strained, chest to chest, the mighty cords and muscles standing out on arms and shoulders and column-like legs. Then with a pant of triumph Bara bent Smith back, back, while the latter's head began to swim, his ribs to crack. The distress on his face was unmistakable, and in that moment the girl realized that however mysterious might be his coming this white giant was no god conquering with a thunder-bolt, a gesture of omnipotence, but a mortal being whom Bara bade fair to overcome. Wildly she looked around for some means of aiding Smith, but even as she did so the complexion of affairs changed. Realizing that at this kind of fighting Bara was his master, Smith let himself go suddenly limp

in his opponent's arms. The ruse succeeded. Taken by surprise the swarthy giant fell to earth on top of his foe who, quick as thought, drew up one knee which took Bara in the stomach with a terrible jolt. Tearing himself free with a wrench, Smith staggered to his feet, breathless, half-spent. But Bara seemed a man of iron. Though momentarily disabled by lack of breath, he was nonetheless on his feet almost as swiftly as his opponent, and without a moment's hesitation again charged. But providence, as he arose, had closed Smith's fingers round a heavy stone. With the strength of desperation he whirled it up in his clenched hand and brought it down with terrific force on the close-cropped head. Like a pole-axed bull the dark giant went down with a battered skull. Smith stared at him stupidly, hardly realizing that the fight was over. But the girl drew his gaze by placing a timid hand on his arm. Slim, she was, and dark, as Bara was dark, her head, with its mass of sleek hair, barely reaching to his shoulder. She was clad in a blouse of gay material, with baggy trousers and knee-high leggings, more like moccasins than shoes. Lovely, she was, with dark brown eyes and vivid gypsy face. "Come," she said in the language he did not know but whose meaning he sensed; "and perhaps we can escape in a skyro before the followers of Bara realize he is dead."

Where everything and every direction was strange to him, Smith was more than willing to trust to the girl's guidance. But first he divested Bara of his clothes and himself donned the soft trousers, the tall footgear, the short tunic and broad leather belt. Then he turned to the girl and signified his willingness to proceed. Through a dense wood she led him, a mile or more, fording the

shallow waters of several streams, until they came to the borders of an irregular glade. Peering from the shelter of concealing leaves, Smith saw several strange craft with long conical bodies and wheel-like discs, set at the end of slender masts, scattered about the glade, the nearest within twenty feet of where they stood. Perhaps a hundred yards away, near the farther edge of the glade, several swarthy men, clad as had been Bara, lounged at ease, seemingly engaged in some engrossing pastime, the playing of cards, it appeared. The girl sought to make it clear that it was her desire to board the nearest craft without attracting the attention of the men. Smith nodded. "Now!" breathed the girl. Hand in hand they raced across the open and swung themselves into the high cockpit of the craft. Instantly she threw a switch set on the wide face of a control board and with a roar that shook the cockpit the discs above began to revolve on their slender spars. The roar softened to a steady purr. Mingled with the purr came the cries of startled men. Smith saw the distant figures leap to their feet, and even as they did so the craft on which he was gave a wild lurch, swung drunkenly like a dying top, and then the earth fell away like a rocket and he was gazing down upon a green sea of foliage, of wild hills and rugged valleys. In that moment he realized that the craft he had boarded was an airship, a helicopter.

Busied with the control-board the girl paid him little attention. Clad in the habiliments of the dead man, tearing through the air at tremendous speed, Smith thought of the strangeness of his position. From the land of the Kolans, the place of the red day, he had passed, as he had passed from earth (was it by the medium of death?) to find himself—where? He came out of his reverie quickly

as the girl spoke and pointed behind. Even before he saw them the import of her words came home to him. The followers of Bara had taken to the air; they were being pursued!

Then began a long and stern chase. At an altitude of seven thousand feet they were rushing headlong toward a range of distant mountains, white peaks of which were silhouetted against the horizon. But fast as they sped the pursuing ships went faster, slowly but surely gaining on them, until but a quarter of a mile intervened between the swarthy men and their quarry. Then from the gaining ships long yellow pencils of light began to reach out like the rays of searchlights. Abruptly the girl made her craft dodge, this way and that, up and down, with incredible agility; but all in vain, for at last a pencil of light caught them fairly, held them at its tip, as an insect is held helplessly at the point of a pin. Instantly the girl pressed down on a button and slid lithely to her feet. There was a hissing noise, a puff as of escaping gas, and in a moment the bright day was blotted out and the airship drifted onward swathed in a fog so dense that scarcely could Smith discern the figure beside him.

"Our *skyro* is caught by the yellow ray," breathed the girl, hardly realizing that Smith could not grasp what she said; "but I've jammed the control of our engine so it can not be stopped, for some time, at least. But we must escape in the smoke-fog I've raised and let the empty *skyro* go on, luring the others away."

From its place in the cockpit she took a tightly rolled bundle which Smith had no difficulty in recognizing as a parachute. But this parachute possessed a double set of harness which the girl attached to her shoulders and

waist and his. "Ready!" she said. Over the side they went together, falling through fog for an interminable distance. The wind whistled by like an avalanche, keen and cold. Then suddenly they were clear of the fog, the parachute billowing above them, swinging slowly to earth from an immense height. Far overhead the blue sky was blotted out by a thunderous cloud which hid all view of the airships. The head of this cloud was traveling rapidly into the faint distance even while its tail was beginning to glimmer and fade.

They came to earth in the foothills of a mountainous range and with some danger and trouble freed themselves from the parachute. It was a wild and lonely spot, a place of rugged peaks and deep ravines. Not without difficulty they made their way to the banks of a brawling stream. The girl found the going rough and toilsome and Smith had to assist her now and then. He went back and salvaged the parachute and the tools that had come with it—a heavy hand-axe and a large knife.

Now he had time to notice the oddness of his surroundings. The vegetation was akin to and yet radically different from that of earth. The sun, low in the heavens, showed a rich golden color with a distinct purple band, and the sky was a deeper blue than he had ever seen it before.

The girl looked up as he approached. He suddenly realized that he neither knew her name nor she his. So he knelt by her side and pointed to himself. "Smith," he said with a smile, "my name is Smith." She repeated distinctly, "Smith, Smith." He nodded and pointed at her. She understood what he wanted. "Dwana," she answered, "Dwana."

Already the shadows were beginning to lengthen in the canyon. "Well, Dwana," said Smith, "I guess we'd better start making camp for the night. And Lord!" he said, more to himself than to her, "but I'm hungry."

Against a shallow depression of rocky cliff he spread the heavy folds of the parachute which would at once answer for a mattress and a cover. Then he gathered together a pile of sticks for a fire before he realized that he had no matches. But Dwana, who had followed his movements closely, produced a small mechanism similar to a cigar lighter, and in a second had a flame applied to the pile. But first she removed all but the very dry branches. "We must be careful about making a heavy smoke," she said anxiously. Then from the package of supplies the parachute had carried, she produced a collapsible bucket and hanging it on a pronged stick over the fire set water to boil. To this water she added some heavy grains of a brown substance taken from a flask and almost at once the air was filled with a tempting fragrance. Beef stew! At least that was what it smelled like to Smith and his mouth watered hungrily. Seated on the heavy cloth of the parachute and basking gratefully in the flame of the fire (it was quite dark now and the air chilly) he and the girl sipped the fragrant concoction from metal cups and nibbled cakes made of an unknown wheat ... unknown to Smith.

High overhead stars came out, stars as clear and as distinct as toy moons. Bats began to flutter round the campfire and night-moths with white and golden wings. It was a strange situation, he had just begun to realize how strange. The lovely gypsy-like face of the girl showed fitfully by light of the burning embers. Dawna,

Dawna. What a beautiful name Dawna was? How wonderful to be sitting here with her in this lonely canyon. He thought of the past, of the grey prison cell of earth, of the human insects, and of his mysterious transitions from one phase of existence to another. Had he actually died . . . twice? Was that what death meant, a flitting from life to life?

Dawna yawned. His own eyelids were heavy. Wrapping her in the folds of the parachute and silently placing the pistol-like weapon by her side, he stretched himself out, the axe under his hand, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

It was a maniacal burst of laughter that brought him surging to his feet in the cold, clear dawn, half startled, out of his wits and with upflung axe. Perhaps twenty paces away and eyeing him through malignant blood-shot eyes was the most hideous creature Smith had ever gazed upon. Of the marsupial family, with small fore-feet and tremendously developed hindquarters, the thing had the tusked bristling head of a wild boar and the horns and beard of a goat. From its gaping nostrils came puffs of breath on the cold air, like steam, and even as Smith leaped to his feet, it caught the movement and, rearing upward like a kangaroo and giving vent to another burst of maniacal laughter, came charging forward through the air in a mighty hop. The girl screamed. Smith side-stepped and brought down the axe with a vicious swing. He felt the blade bite deeply into flesh and bone. But one flailing forepaw, as the monster blundered by, wrenched the axe from his grip and sent him crashing to earth, half-stunned. Then the maddened beast wheeled, and it would have gone fatally for Smith

if the girl had not levelled her gleaming weapon across his prostrate body and fired with steady aim. At the same moment she caught at his tunic with her free hand, and he had the wit to respond to the jerk by rolling to safety. Down crashed the hideous beast on the very spot where his body had lain a second before, and when Smith staggered to his feet it was to see it threshing in its death agony, a wisp of smoke rising from the charred flesh of what had once been its head. Sick and giddy, he turned to the girl who, now that the danger was over, had sunk nervelessly to the ground. "Dwana," he faltered. "You're a brave kid, Dwana. If it hadn't been for you . . ." He held her hand tightly in his and she made no attempt to remove it. So they sat for a few minutes, then together examined the slain beast. Its head had been shattered and burned as if by a lightning bolt. Smith looked at the gleaming pistol-like weapon with interest. Evidently it was a deadly contrivance. Later he learned that it discharged a heat ray.

Under the direction of Dwana, he skinned the slain creature; they breakfasted on slices of its flesh, which, broiled over a wood fire, were deliciously tender and tasted like pork. Dwana made him understand that the *orkru* (for so she called the beast) was a very rare animal and seldom encountered; that, in fact, she had never before seen one except in pictures.

So began for Smith the first of many days he would never forget. In an incredibly brief time he learned to talk the girl's language. He gathered that the world in which he now existed was called *Sigart*, the particular country around him *Aimar*, and that Bara had kidnapped Dawna from her home in the capital city of *Mex-can* far

to the north. Bara, he sensed, had been a sinister character, what in America would be called a gangster chief, and in addition a spurned suitor who would not take no for an answer.

"He captured me from my father's house in *Mex-can*," said the girl, "and intended to take me to the city of *Sitnah* where his word is law. But I managed to escape from him in the wilderness, only to be overtaken, and if it had not been for you Who are you," she asked, "who appeared out of nothing like a god when I cried for help?"

"Not a god," said Smith with a troubled lagh, "but a man. And as for who I am . . ." he made a vague gesture. "This much I can tell you, that my name is Joseph Smith, that once I lived in a world called Earth." He went on to describe his own planet, the land of the Kolans, his mysterious metamorphosis. "And whether it means that I have died twice, or that what I have undergone and am undergoing is all a dream, I cannot say. But if being here with you is a dream, I hope I do not awake."

They were sitting by their fire on an almost inaccessible ledge of rock when he said this. For several days they had climbed to reach their present eyrie. Above them rose the ultimate reaches of a lone peak; to one side the stream they had followed gushed from an invisible source. The girl had explained their position.

"Between us and the nearest outpost of civilized Ainar lies five hundred miles of savage wilderness peopled by the tribes of the *Erlong*, the Night People. To attempt crossing their country would be suicidal. So we must find a place capable of defense high up in the mountains and wait for the coming of my father's ships which will surely be searching for me." She added that, with the loss of

their leader, the followers of Bara would probably return to their old haunts and not seek her any more. So they had found their present refuge, hoisted a signal from the peak, and now basking by the fire after a meal of mountain trout they talked, their dreaming faces illumed by the leaping flames. The girl did not look at Smith, but somehow her small hand spanned the space separating them and found his. His fingers closed quickly over hers. So they sat, conscious only of their wildly beating hearts, of one another. "Dawna," breathed Smith. But suddenly the girl stiffened. "Hush!" she warned softly, "what is that?" Her acute hearing had caught an almost inaudible sound. "Something," she said, "is clambering up the path."

Smith seized a flaming brand and hurled it over the edge of the cliff. Half way down the steep trail it struck and lighted up for a brief moment what seemed the outlines of a crouching figure. Instantly he rolled several large stones, a pile of which he had gathered for such purpose, down the path. From below came a stifled cry of pain, the sound of hasty retreat, and when he threw a second brand the figure had disappeared. The girl crouched by his side with the heat pistol. "I'm afraid it's the *Erlongs*, the Night People." She had told Smith of those terrible natives, troglydytes of the wilderness, primitive men akin to the ape and yet possessing such cunning and ferocity as to defy all attempts of the *Ainarians* to conquer them or settle in their country. "I hope not," said Smith fervently.

All night he lay on guard, but morning dawned without further alarm, and daybreak revealed no evidence of enemies. "Perhaps it was some animal I routed," suggested Smith. "Perhaps," said the girl. She was rather grave and silent and clambered to the summit of the peak from

whence she could scan the surrounding country. Smith made ready for the hunt. He suggested that the girl stay on the ledge while he visited the traps set out for small game in the thickets below, but she shook her head. "I would rather be with you."

They were crossing a grassy dell, Smith in the lead, when without warning, out of a thicket, suddenly sprang what appeared to be the terrifying figure of a huge gorilla. Heavy and shaggy, mounted on powerful bowed legs, the body of the apparition suggested immense physical strength. Only the upraised club in the hairy paws, a weapon of fashioned wood, made Smith realize that this was no ape, but an *Erlong*, one of the Night People. Over his head towered the heavy club, whirled aloft by bestial hands, and if he had sought to flee or to side-step his fate would have been sealed. But with the courage of desperation, the open knife in his hand, he hurled himself straight at the throat of the troglydte. Through muscle and flesh he drove the foot-long blade, and the hot blood gushed into his face. Down crashed the club, but he was against the hairy body and protected from its deadly sweep. Again, he stabbed, — again, in a wild succession of blows. Dropping the club and letting out a bellow of rage and hurt, the *Erlong* wrapped its muscular arms around Smith in a rib-cracking hug. But luck was with the later. One of the chance blows cut the spinal cord, robbing the troglydte of sense and co-ordinated physical action. Dazed and almost spent Smith tore himself free of the relaxing body just as it crashed to earth. The girl was screaming. Thirty yards away other troglydytes appeared, running forward with long awkward strides. "Quick!" panted the girl. Over rocks and through thickets they scrambled.

Out of a shallow gully leaped a troglydyte and the girl shot him down with a withering blast of heat. Up the slope they went. The girl fell, exhausted, and Smith lifted her in his arms and staggered on. Around him fell a shower of stones and clubs. How he made the brow of the hill unhurt was a miracle, but make it he did, and his first instinctive act was to roll down on his pursuers a huge boulder. This cleared the steep path of all save one troglydyte, battered, senseless. He turned to the girl who sat up, a stoical look of suffering on her face.

"My ankle," she said. "I've sprained it."

Already it was beginning to swell. He lifted her to where she could sit and dangle the foot in the icy water of the stream.

"Cold compresses are good for sprains," he said, "and perhaps this bathing will serve."

Then they held a council of war. Neither of them could disguise the fact that their situation was desperate. Without food and inadequately armed, how long could they expect to hold out? "For the Night People are implacable enemies," said the girl. "They will never abandon the seige. Rather will they send for reinforcements."

"Well," said Smith grimly, "we can but do our best, and if the worst comes to the worst..." he shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps the ships of your people..."

"Perhaps," she said hopefully.

Fortunately the ledge shelved inward at a slight decline. The sheer walls of the cliff on either side were almost unscalable, and to the rear of the peak the ground was rough and precipitous. But even as Smith took stock of these natural advantages, a great stone whizzed by his ear and hit the face of the peak behind them with a dull thud.

"What the . . ." exclaimed Smith. "A catapult!" cried the girl, and even as she spoke he saw that the *Erlongs* had advanced into the open with a clumsy contrivance made of crude logs and a springy sapling. This casting device was slow in action and not always accurate, but for all that no place on the ledge was safe from the missiles it threw. Something had to be done — quickly.

"How many shots are left in the pistol?" he asked.

"Four," answered the girl.

Smith hefted the weapon. It fitted his hand as snugly as a revolver and its operation was no different. He explained to the girl his intention. The girl protested. But the troglydytes were now handling their casting with more accuracy and speed and a stone whizzed between Smith and herself as she protested. He swept the girl aside as another stone crashed. "Be careful," he cried. "That catapult has to be put out of business." Over the edge of the ledge he swung. The stones were falling with more accuracy and the danger of being hit by one on the path was that much lessened. Crouching low he charged downward and the *Erlongs* saw him coming and set up a blood-curdling roar. Several sprang forward with upraised clubs. Smith came to an abrupt halt and fired. The first blast struck the advancing troglydytes more or less in file and three of them went down, clutching hairy breasts from which rose acrid smoke. The second took an Erlong manipulating the catapult in the face and wiped out the features at one searing breath. The remaining troglydytes fled to cover and a shower of clubs fell around Smith. Realizing his danger he hastily retreated. The girl met him with tearful eyes. "If you had been killed," she said reproachfully, "what would I have done?" The cries of

the troglydytes ceased. For the moment, at any rate, the catapult was out of action. Crouching on that bare ledge Smith saw nothing but the girl's face. His hand went out and, "Dawna," he breathed, drawing the slight form towards him. The girl made no resistance. The dark eyes fell under the light in his own. With a sudden surge of passion Smith swept her into his arms and bent his lips to her own parted ones. So they were for a pregnant heart-beat, and then— he released the girl and whirled about as a shower of earth and fine stones rattled down on the ledge. The sight that met his eyes was terrifying enough. From the brow of the peak overhanging the ledge swung the monstrous body of a troglydyte. Even as he glared the body dropped and another swung into view. The truth hit him like the impact of a bullet. The Night People had managed to scale the peak at the rear and were attacking them from above.

The next few moments were a nightmare. Smith fired. The troglydyte on the ledge clawed and went down. Smith dropped the pistol, sprang at the dangling feet of the other troglydyte, and with a mighty effort pulled him from his hold and whirled him over the sheer side of the ledge to the rocks twenty feet below. How the axe came into his hand he never knew. But he swung it up and down and the broad blade sheared through the skull of an *Erlong* as if through paper. Even as the blow fell he heard the girl scream, "Look! look!" and over the peak swept a long gleaming craft with revolving wheels at the end of slender spars. "A Mex-can ship!" cried the girl deliriously. "We are saved! saved!"

Smith saw dusky faces peering over the sides of the craft, heard the excited shouting of many voices. Down

to the ledge sank the helicopter, but the coming of the troglydites was almost as swift. Reinforced by hundreds of their tribesmen, and enraged at the thought of the escape of their enemies, the beseigers swept up the steep path and down over the brow of the peak in two furious waves that nothing could withstand. The heat guns of the Mex-cans mowed down the first of the Erlongs. Smith swung Dawna to safety over the side of the airship, but there was no time to board the craft himself. Were that living avalanche to reach the ship, it and its crew would be overwhelmed. "Up!" screamed Smith imploringly. "Up!" and realizing the danger, the revolving wheels turned with a roar and the helicopter went up — with Smith clinging to a projection in its hull with both hands. But a great weight dragged at his dangling legs, almost tearing loose his grip, and looking down he saw that a huge troglydite had grasped him by the ankles with hairy paws and was sailing with him through the air. Desperately he sought to kick himself clear, but in vain. Over the side of the airship the Mex-cans leaned, trying to grasp his hands and draw him to safety, but he was beyond their reach. He saw the agonized face of Dawna look down into his own and from the barrel of a heat pistol leaped a searing bolt. The troglydite let go his hold with a hoarse cry and at the same moment a length of rope was flung from above. "Smith!" cried Dawna, "Smith!" But Smith could not respond to her appeal. Weariness unutterable had him in its grip. Over his flesh a tremor seemed to run. Sick and giddy, he felt his fingers slip, caught one last glimpse of a beloved face, thought to himself, "This is the end — I am falling," and then — airship, sky and earth turned like a spinwheel and rushed in on him with incredible

speed, fading into grey nothingness as they rushed; and then out of that grey nothingness loomed buildings of stone, a crowded thoroughfare, and as he stared with bewildered eyes, something struck him and he went down, and darkness blotted out consciousness.

* * * * *

As we know, he came to himself in Fabiola Hospital in Oakland. Imagine his emotions. The earth belonged to his past, and it were as if the past had leaned out into the future and caught him to itself. It was some time before he understood. But the presence of the grim-faced police helped him to realize his position. He was a recaptured criminal and facing the gas chamber. But of his escape he could tell them nothing, knowing nothing to tell; so he held his peace and was vainly trying to separate fact from fancy when Doctor Stanson, the prison physician, waved away the guard and looked down upon him with inscrutable eyes.

“So you have come back,” said the doctor softly. “How did you find things where you were?”

Smith stared.

“It was the drug I gave you to drink,” continued Stanson. “I can’t explain it to you scientifically, because you wouldn’t understand; but the liquid caused you to grow enormously until you passed out of your prison cell and out of this earth. How? That doesn’t matter. Suffice it to say that you did. There is an infinity of bigness, of worlds beyond worlds. So I reasoned— and experimented; with rabbits and guinea pigs; then with you. You were a condemned man, and if my experiment had wiped you out, well and good. But I was positive you would continue to live— somewhere. So I gave you the drug, sent you

out into the infinity of bigness, knowing that when the effects of the drug wore off you would dwindle again in size, return to earth. Therefore I watched and waited—and you returned. Tell me your story.”

And after some hesitation and further questioning, Smith told it to him. The doctor nodded slowly. “It is as I thought. There are different planes of existence, separated by degrees in size, determined by varying rates of vibration. And the illusion of time differs for every plane. You imagine you have been longer in those worlds than is the case according to earthly time.” He paused thoughtfully. “The delayed action of the drug can also be explained—and accounted for.” He bent over Smith and caught him by the shoulder. “Listen,” he said slowly, “I have a desire to see those worlds—and to have you with me as companion and guide. By a method I need not describe, I shall take the wherewithal to stabilize ourselves on any plane we wish—the plane of your Dawna, perhaps; and the facilities to return to earth, should we wish.” He looked at Smith coldly. “But keep your tongue between your teeth. A word of this, or of your experience, and you’ll go to the gas chamber for sure.

There remains but to quote the following from the San Francisco *Examiner* for September 25th:

“Sensational Escape. Again Smith Disappears on Eve of Execution. Prison Doctor also Missing.” And underneath the headlines:

“Joseph Smith, who once before escaped from the death-house at San Quentin under mysterious circumstances, and who was being heavily guarded while awaiting execution, has again preformed the impossible and escaped

the law. Doctor Stanson, the prison physician, who entered the prisoner's cell with a sedative, disappeared at the same time. Rumors that the guards were in conspiracy with the doctor to effect the condemned man's escape have been denied by the warden The authorities are confident that they will soon find Doctor Stanson and recapture Smith"

But to date they never have.

