

**CITY OF
ENDLESS NIGHT**

MILO HASTINGS

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CITY OF ENDLESS NIGHT

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CHAPTER I

THE RED AND BLACK AND GOLD STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY ON THE CHANGING MAP OF THE WORLD

1

When but a child of seven my uncle placed me in a private school in which one of the so-called redeemed sub-sailors was a teacher of the German language. As I look back now, in the light of my present knowledge, I better comprehend the docile humility and carefully nurtured ignorance of this man. In his class rooms he used as a text a description of German life, taken from the captured submarine. From this book he had secured his own conception of a civilization of which he really knew practically nothing. I recall how we used to ask Herr Meineke if he had actually seen those strange things of which he taught us. To this he always made answer, "The book is official, man's observation errs."

2

"He can talk it," said my playmates who attended the public schools where all teaching of the language of the outcast nation was prohibited. They invariably elected me to be "the Germans," and locked me up in the old garage while they rained a stock of sundried clay bombs upon the roof and then came with a rush to "batter down the walls of Berlin" by breaking in the door, while I, muttering

strange guttural oaths, would be led forth to be “exterminated.”

On rainy days I would sometimes take my favoured playmates into my uncle’s library where five great maps hung in ordered sequence on the panelled wall.

The first map was labelled “The Age of Nations--1914,” and showed the black spot of Germany, like in size to many of the surrounding countries, the names of which one recited in the history class.

The second map--”Germany’s Maximum Expansion of the First World War--1918”--showed the black area trebled in size, crowding into the pale gold of France, thrusting a hungry arm across the Hellespont towards Bagdad, and, from the Balkans to the Baltic, blotting out all else save the flaming red of Bolshevik Russia, which spread over the Eastern half of Europe like a pool of fresh spilled blood.

Third came “The Age of the League of Nations, 1919--1983,” with the gold of democracy battling with the spreading red of socialism, for the black of autocracy had erstwhile vanished.

The fourth map was the most fascinating and terrible. Again the black of autocracy appeared, obliterating the red of the Brotherhood of Man, spreading across half of Eurasia and thrusting a broad black shadow to the Yellow Sea and a lesser one to the Persian Gulf. This map was labelled “Maximum German Expansion of the Second World War, 1988,” and lines of dotted white retreated in concentric waves till the line of 2041.

This same year was the first date of the fifth map, which was labelled “A Century of the World State,” and here, as all the sea was blue, so all the land was gold, save one black blot that might have been made by a single spattered drop of ink, for it was no bigger than the Irish Island. The persistence of this remaining black on the map of the world troubled my boyish mind, as it has troubled three generations of the United World, and strive as I might, I could not comprehend why the great blackness of the fourth map had been erased and this small blot alone remained.

3

When I returned from school for my vacation, after I had my first year of physical science, I sought out my uncle in his laboratory and asked him to explain the mystery of the little black island standing adamant in the golden sea of all the world.

“That spot,” said my uncle, “would have been erased in two more years if a Leipzig professor had not discovered The Ray. Yet we do not know his name nor how he made his discovery.”

“But just what is The Ray?” I asked.

“We do not know that either, nor how it is made. We only know that it destroys the oxygen carrying power of living blood. If it were an emanation from a substance like radium, they could have fired it in projectiles and so conquered the earth. If it were ether waves like electricity, we should have been able to have insulated against it, or they should have been able to project it farther and destroy our aircraft, but The Ray is not destructive beyond two thousand metres in the air and hardly that far in the earth.”

“Then why do we not fly over and land an army and great guns and batter down the walls of Berlin and be done with it?”

“That, as you know if you studied your history, has been tried many times and always with disaster. The bomb-torn soil of that black land is speckled white with the bones of World armies who were sent on landing invasions before you or I was born. But it was only heroic folly, one gun popping out of a tunnel mouth can slay a thousand men. To pursue the gunners into their catacombs meant to be gassed; and sometimes our forces were left to land in peace and set up their batteries to fire against Berlin, but the Germans would place Ray generators in the ground beneath them and slay our forces in an hour, as the Angel of Jehovah withered the hosts of the Assyrians.”

“But why,” I persisted, “do we not tunnel under the Ray generators and dig our way to Berlin and blow it up?”

My uncle smiled indulgently. “And that has been tried too, but they can hear our borings with microphones and cut us off, just as we cut them off when they try to tunnel out and place new generators. It

is too slow, too difficult, either way; the line has wavered a little with the years but to no practical avail; the war in our day has become merely a watching game, we to keep the Germans from coming out, they to keep us from penetrating within gunshot of Berlin; but to gain a mile of worthless territory either way means too great a human waste to be worth the price. Things must go on as they are till the Germans tire of their sunless imprisonment or till they exhaust some essential element in their soil. But wars such as you read of in your history, will never happen again. The Germans cannot fight the world in the air, nor in the sea, nor on the surface of the earth; and we cannot fight the Germans in the ground; so the war has become a fixed state of standing guard; the hope of victory, the fear of defeat have vanished; the romance of war is dead."

"But why, then," I asked, "does the World Patrol continue to bomb the roof of Berlin?"

"Politics," replied my uncle, "military politics, just futile display of pyrotechnics to amuse the populace and give heroically inclined young men a chance to strut in uniforms--but after the election this fall such folly will cease."

4

My uncle had predicted correctly, for by the time I again came home on my vacation, the newly elected Pacifist Council had reduced the aerial activities to mere watchful patrolling over the land of the enemy. Then came the report of an attempt to launch an airplane from the roof of Berlin. The people, in dire panic lest Ray generators were being carried out by German aircraft, had clamoured for the recall of the Pacifist Council, and the bombardment of Berlin was resumed.

During the lull of the bombing activities my uncle, who stood high with the Pacifist Administration, had obtained permission to fly over Europe, and I, most fortunate of boys, accompanied him. The plane in which we travelled bore the emblem of the World Patrol. On a cloudless day we sailed over the pock-marked desert that had once been Germany and came within field-glass range of Berlin

itself. On the wasted, bomb-torn land lay the great grey disc--the city of mystery. Three hundred metres high they said it stood, but so vast was its extent that it seemed as flat and thin as a pancake on a griddle.

“More people live in that mass of concrete,” said my uncle, “than in the whole of America west of the Rocky Mountains.” His statement, I have since learned, fell short of half the truth, but then it seemed appalling. I fancied the city a giant anthill, and searched with my glass as if I expected to see the ants swarming out. But no sign of life was visible upon the monotonous surface of the sand-blanketed roof, and high above the range of naked vision hung the hawk-like watchers of the World Patrol.

The lure of unravelled secrets, the ambition for discovery and exploration stirred my boyish veins. Yes, I would know more of the strange race, the unknown life that surged beneath that grey blanket of mystery. But how? For over a century millions of men had felt that same longing to know. Aviators, landing by accident or intent within the lines, had either returned with nothing to report, or they had not returned. Daring journalists, with baskets of carrier pigeons, had on foggy nights dropped by parachute to the roof of the city; but neither they nor the birds had brought back a single word of what lay beneath the armed and armoured roof.

My own resolution was but a boy's dream and I returned to Chicago to take up my chemical studies.

CHAPTER II

I EXPLORE THE POTASH MINES OF STASSFURT AND FIND A DIARY IN A DEAD MAN'S POCKET

1

When I was twenty-four years old, my uncle was killed in a laboratory explosion. He had been a scientist of renown and a chemical inventor who had devoted his life to the unravelling of the secrets of the synthetic foods of Germany. For some years I had been his trusted assistant. In our Chicago laboratory were carefully preserved food samples that had been taken from the captured submarines in years gone by; and what to me was even more fascinating, a collection of German books of like origin, which I had read with avidity. With the exception of those relating to submarine navigation, I found them stupidly childish and decided that they had been prepared to hide the truth and not reveal it.

My uncle had bequeathed me both his work and his fortune, but despairing of my ability worthily to continue his own brilliant researches on synthetic food, I turned my attention to the potash problem, in which I had long been interested. My reading of early chemical works had given me a particular interest in the reclamation of the abandoned potash mines of Stassfurt. These mines, as any student of chemical history will know, were one of the richest properties of the old German state in the days before the endless war began and Germany became isolated from the rest of the world. The mines were captured by the World in the year 2020, and were

profitably operated for a couple of decades. Meanwhile the German lines were forced many miles to the rear before the impregnable barrier of the Ray had halted the progress of the World Armies.

A few years after the coming of the Ray defences, occurred what history records as "The Tragedy of the Mines." Six thousand workmen went down into the potash mines of Stassfurt one morning and never came up again. The miners' families in the neighbouring villages died like weevils in fumigated grain. The region became a valley of pestilence and death, and all life withered for miles around. Numerous governmental projects were launched for the recovery of the potash mines but all failed, and for one hundred and eleven years no man had penetrated those accursed shafts.

Knowing these facts, I wasted no time in soliciting government aid for my project, but was content to secure a permit to attempt the recovery with private funds, with which my uncle's fortune supplied me in abundance.

In April, 2151, I set up my laboratory on the edge of the area of death. I had never accepted the orthodox view as to the composition of the gas that issued from the Stassfurt mines. In a few months I was gratified to find my doubts confirmed. A short time after this I made a more unexpected and astonishing discovery. I found that this complex and hitherto misunderstood gas could, under the influence of certain high-frequency electrical discharges, be made to combine with explosive violence with the nitrogen of the atmosphere, leaving only a harmless residue. We wired the surrounding region for the electrical discharge and, with a vast explosion of weird purple flame, cleared the whole area of the century-old curse. Our laboratory was destroyed by the explosion. It was rebuilt nearer the mine shafts from which the gas still slowly issued. Again we set up our electrical machinery and dropped our cables into the shafts, this time clearing the air of the mines.

A hasty exploration revealed the fact that but a single shaft had remained intact. A third time we prepared our electrical machinery. We let down a cable and succeeded in getting but a faint reaction at the bottom of the shaft. After several repeated clearings we risked descent.

Upon arrival at the bottom we were surprised to find it free from

water, save for a trickling stream. The second thing we discovered was a pile of huddled skeletons of the workmen who had perished over a century previous. But our third and most important discovery was a boring from which the poisonous gas was slowly issuing. It took but a few hours to provide an apparatus to fire this gas as fast as it issued, and the potash mines of Stassfurt were regained for the world.

My associates were for beginning mining operations at once, but I had been granted a twenty years' franchise on the output of these mines, and I was in no such haste. The boring from which this poisonous vapour issued was clearly man-made; moreover I alone knew the formula of that gas and had convinced myself once for all as to its man-made origin. I sent for microphones and with their aid speedily detected the sound of machinery in other workings beneath.

It is easy now to see that I erred in risking my own life as I did without the precaution of confiding the secret of my discovery to others. But those were days of feverish excitement. Impulsively I decided to make the first attack on the Germans as a private enterprise and then call for military aid. I had my own equipment of poisonous bombs and my sapping and mining experts determined that the German workings were but eighty metres beneath us. Hastily, among the crumbling skeletons, we set up our electrical boring machinery and began sinking a one-metre shaft towards the nearest sound.

After twenty hours of boring, the drill head suddenly came off and rattled down into a cavern. We saw a light and heard guttural shouting below and the cracking of a gun as a few bullets spattered against the roof of our chamber. We heaved down our gas bombs and covered over our shaft. Within a few hours the light below went out and our microphones failed to detect any sound from the rocks beneath us. It was then perhaps that I should have called for military aid, but the uncanny silence of the lower workings proved too much for my eager curiosity. We waited two days and still there was no evidence of life below. I knew there had been ample time for the gas from our bombs to have been dissipated, as it was decomposed by contact with moisture. A light was lowered, but this brought forth no response.

I now called for a volunteer to descend the shaft. None was forthcoming from among my men, and against their protest I insisted on being lowered into the shaft. When I was a few metres from the bottom the cable parted and I fell and lay stunned on the floor below.

2

When I recovered consciousness the light had gone out. There was no sound about me. I shouted up the shaft above and could get no answer. The chamber in which I lay was many times my height and I could make nothing out in the dark hole above. For some hours I scarcely stirred and feared to burn my pocket flash both because it might reveal my presence to lurking enemies and because I wished to conserve my battery against graver need.

But no rescue came from my men above. Only recently, after the lapse of years, did I learn the cause of their deserting me. As I lay stunned from my fall, my men, unable to get answer to their shoutings, had given me up for dead. Meanwhile the apparatus which caused the destruction of the German gas had gone wrong. My associates, unable to fix it, had fled from the mine and abandoned the enterprise.

After some hours of waiting I stirred about and found means to erect a rough scaffold and reach the mouth of the shaft above me. I attempted to climb, but, unable to get a hold on the smooth wet rock, I gave up exhausted and despairing. Entombed in the depths of the earth, I was either a prisoner of the German potash miners, if any remained alive, or a prisoner of the earth itself, with dead men for company.

Collecting my courage I set about to explore my surroundings. I found some mining machinery evidently damaged by the explosion of our gas bombs. There was no evidence of men about, living or dead. Stealthily I set out along the little railway track that ran through a passage down a steep incline. As I progressed I felt the air rapidly becoming colder. Presently I stumbled upon the first victim of our gas bombs, fallen headlong as he was fleeing. I hurried on.

The air seemed to be blowing in my face and the cold was becoming intense. This puzzled me for at this depth the temperature should have been above that on the surface of the earth.

After a hundred metres or so of going I came into a larger chamber. It was intensely cold. From out another branching passage-way I could hear a sizzling sound as of steam escaping. I started to turn into this passage but was met with such a blast of cold air that I dared not face it for fear of being frozen. Stamping my feet, which were fast becoming numb, I made the rounds of the chamber, and examined the dead miners that were tumbled about. The bodies were frozen.

One side of this chamber was partitioned off with some sort of metal wall. The door stood blown open. It felt a little warmer in here and I entered and closed the door. Exploring the room with my dim light I found one side of it filled with a row of bunks--in each bunk a corpse. Along the other side of the room was a table with eating utensils and back of this were shelves with food packages.

I was in danger of freezing to death and, tumbling several bodies out of the bunks, I took the mattresses and built of them a clumsy enclosure and installed in their midst a battery heater which I found. In this fashion I managed to get fairly warm again. After some hours of huddling I observed that the temperature had moderated.

My fear of freezing abated, I made another survey of my surroundings and discovered something that had escaped my first attention. In the far end of the room was a desk, and seated before it with his head fallen forward on his arms was the form of a man. The miners had all been dressed in a coarse artificial leather, but this man was dressed in a woven fabric of cellulose silk.

The body was frozen. As I tumbled it stiffly back it fell from the chair exposing a ghastly face. I drew away in a creepy horror, for as I looked at the face of the corpse I suffered a sort of waking nightmare in which I imagined that I was gazing at my own dead countenance.

I concluded that my normal mind was slipping out of gear and proceeded to back off and avail myself of a tube of stimulant which I carried in my pocket.

This revived me somewhat, but again, when I tried to look upon

the frozen face, the conviction returned that I was looking at my own dead self.

I glanced at my watch and figured out that I had been in the German mine for thirty hours and had not tasted food or drink for nearly forty hours. Clearly I had to get myself in shape to escape hallucinations. I went back to the shelves and proceeded to look for food and drink. Happily, due to my work in my uncle's laboratory, these synthetic foods were not wholly strange to me. I drank copiously of a non-alcoholic chemical liquor and warmed on the heater and partook of some nitrogenous and some starchy porridges. It was an uncanny dining place, but hunger soon conquers mere emotion, and I made out a meal. Then once more I faced the task of confronting this dead likeness of myself.

This time I was clear-headed enough. I even went to the miners' lavatory and, jerking down the metal mirror, scrutinized my own reflection and reassured myself of the closeness of the resemblance. My purpose framed in my mind as I did this. Clearly I was in German quarters and was likely to remain there. Sooner or later there must be a rescuing party.

Without further ado, I set about changing my clothing for that of the German. The fit of the dead man's clothes further emphasized the closeness of the physical likeness. I recalled my excellent command of the German language and began to wonder what manner of man I was supposed to be in this assumed personality. But my most urgent task was speedily to make way with the incriminating corpse. With the aid of the brighter flashlight which I found in my new pockets, I set out to find a place to hide the body.

The cold that had so frightened me had now given way to almost normal temperature. There was no longer the sound of sizzling steam from the unexplored passage-way. I followed this and presently came upon another chamber filled with machinery. In one corner a huge engine, covered with frost, gave off a chill greeting. On the floor was a steaming puddle of liquid, but the breath of this steam cut like a blizzard. At once I guessed it. This was a liquid air engine. The dead engineer in the corner helped reveal the story. With his death from the penetrating gas, something had gone wrong with the engine. The turbine head had blown off, and the conveying pipe of

liquid air had poured forth the icy blast that had so nearly frozen me along with the corpses of the Germans. But now the flow of liquid had ceased, and the last remnants were evaporating from the floor. Evidently the supply pipe had been shut off further back on the line, and I had little time to lose for rescuers were probably on the way.

Along one of the corridors running from the engine room I found an open water drain half choked with melting ice. Following this I came upon a grating where the water disappeared. I jerked up the grating and dropped a piece of ice down the well-like shaft. I hastily returned and dragged forth the corpse of my double and with it everything I had myself brought into the mine. Straightening out the stiffened body I plunged it head foremost into the opening. The sound of a splash echoed within the dismal depths.

I now hastened back to the chamber into which I had first fallen and destroyed the scaffolding I had erected there. Returning to the desk where I had found the man whose clothing I wore, I sat down and proceeded to search my abundantly filled pockets. From one of them I pulled out a bulky notebook and a number of loose papers. The freshest of these was an official order from the Imperial Office of Chemical Engineers. The order ran as follows:

Capt. Karl Armstadt
Laboratory 186, E. 58.

Report is received at this office of the sound of sapping operations in potash mine D5. Go at once and verify the same and report of condition of gas generators and make analyses of output of the same.

Evidently I was Karl Armstadt and very happily a chemical engineer by profession. My task of impersonation so far looked feasible--I could talk chemical engineering.

The next paper I proceeded to examine was an identification folder done up in oiled fabric. Thanks to German thoroughness it was amusingly complete. On the first page appeared what I soon discovered to be *my* pedigree for four generations back. The printed form on which all this was minutely filled out made very clear

statements from which I determined that my father and mother were both dead.

I, Karl Armstadt, twenty-seven years of age, was the fourteenth child of my mother and was born when she was forty-two years of age. According to the record I was the ninety-seventh child of my father and born when he was fifty-four. As I read this I thought there was something here that I misunderstood, although subsequent discoveries made it plausible enough. There was no further record of my plentiful fraternity, but I took heart that the mere fact of their numerical abundance would make unlikely any great show of brotherly interest, a presumption which proved quite correct.

On the second page of this folder I read the number and location of my living quarters, the sources from which my meals and clothing were issued, as well as the sizes and qualities of my garments and numerous other references to various details of living, all of which seemed painstakingly ridiculous at the time.

I put this elaborate identification paper back into its receptacle and opened the notebook. It proved to be a diary kept likewise in thorough German fashion. I turned to the last pages and perused them hastily.

The notes in Armstadt's diary were concerned almost wholly with his chemical investigations. All this I saw might be useful to me later but what I needed more immediately was information as to his personal life. I scanned back hastily through the pages for a time without finding any such revelations. Then I discovered this entry made some months previously:

"I cannot think of chemistry tonight, for the vision of Katrina dances before me as in a dream. It must be a strange mixture of blood-lines that could produce such wondrous beauty. In no other woman have I seen such a blackness of hair and eyes combined with such a whiteness of skin. I suppose I should not have danced with her--now I see all my resolutions shattered. But I think it was most of all the blackness of her eyes. Well, what care, we live but once!"

I read and re-read this entry and searched feverishly in Armstadt's diary for further evidence of a personal life. But I only found tedious notes on his chemical theories. Perhaps this single reference to a woman was but a passing fancy of a man otherwise engrossed in

his science. But if rescuers came and I succeeded in passing for the German chemist the presence of a woman in my new rôle of life would surely undo all my effort. If no personal acquaintance of the dead man came with the rescuing party I saw no reason why I could not for the time pass successfully as Armstadt. I should at least make the effort and I reasoned I could best do this by playing the malingerer and appearing mentally incompetent. Such a ruse, I reasoned, would give me opportunity to hear much and say little, and perhaps so get my bearings in the new rôle that I could continue it successfully.

Then, as I was about to return the notebook to my pocket, my hopes sank as I found this brief entry which I had at first scanning overlooked:

“It is twenty days now since Katrina and I have been united. She does not interfere with my work as much as I feared. She even lets me talk chemistry to her, though I am sure she understands not one word of what I tell her. I think I have made a good selection and it is surely a permanent one. Therefore I must work harder than ever or I shall not get on.”

This alarmed me. Yet, if Armstadt had married he made very little fuss about it. Evidently it concerned him chiefly in relation to his work. But whoever and whatever Katrina was, it was clear that her presence would be disastrous to my plans of assuming his place in the German world.

Pondering over the ultimate difficulty of my situation, but with a growing faith in the plan I had evolved for avoiding immediate explanations, I fell into a long-postponed sleep. The last thing I remember was tumbling from my chair and sprawling out upon the floor where I managed to snap out my light before the much needed sleep quite overcame me.

3

I was awakened by voices, and opened my eyes to find the place brightly lighted. I closed them again quickly as some one approached and prodded me with the toe of his boot.

"Here is a man alive," said a voice above me.

"He is Captain Armstadt, the chemist," said another voice, approaching; "this is good. We have special orders to search for him."

The newcomer bent over and felt my heart. I was quite aware that it was functioning normally. He shook me and called me by name. After repeated shakings I opened my eyes and stared at him blankly, but I said nothing. Presently he left me and returned with a stretcher. I lay inertly as I was placed thereon and borne out of the chamber. Other stretcher-bearers were walking ahead. We passed through the engine room where mechanics were at work on the damaged liquid air engine. My stretcher was placed on a little car which moved swiftly along the tunnel.

We came into a large subterranean station and I was removed and brought before a bevy of white garbed physicians. They looked at my identification folder and then examined me. Through it all I lay limp and as near lifeless as I could simulate, and they succeeded in getting no speech out of me. The final orders were to forward me post haste to the Imperial Hospital for Complex Gas Cases.

After an eventless journey of many hours I was again unloaded and transferred to an elevator. For several hundred metres we sped upward through a shaft, while about us whistled a blast of cold, crisp air. At last the elevator stopped and I was carried out to an ambulance that stood waiting in a brilliantly lighted passage arched over with grey concrete. I was no longer beneath the surface of the earth but was somewhere in the massive concrete structure of the City of Berlin.

After a short journey our ambulance stopped and attendants came out and carried my litter through an open doorway and down a long hall into the spacious ward of a hospital.

From half closed eyes I glanced about apprehensively for a black-haired woman. With a sigh of relief I saw there were only doctors and male attendants in the room. They treated me most professionally and gave no sign that they suspected I was other than Capt. Karl Armstadt, which fact my papers so eloquently testified. The conclusion of their examination was voiced in my presence. "Physically he is normal," said the head physician, "but his mind

seems in a stupor. There is no remedy, as the nature of the gas is unknown. All that can be done is to await the wearing off of the effect.”

I was then left alone for some hours and my appetite was troubling me. At last an attendant approached with some savoury soup; he propped me up and proceeded to feed me with a spoon.

I made out from the conversation about me that the other patients were officers from the underground fighting forces. An atmosphere of military discipline pervaded the hospital and I felt reassured in the conclusion that all visiting was forbidden.

Yet my thoughts turned repeatedly to the black-eyed Katrina of Armstadt's diary. No doubt she had been informed of the rescue and was waiting in grief and anxiety to see him. So both she and I were awaiting a tragic moment--she to learn that her husband or lover was dead, I for the inevitable tearing off of my protecting disguise.

After some days the head physician came to my cot and questioned me. I gazed at him and knit my brows as if struggling to think.

“You were gassed in the mine,” he kept repeating, “can you remember?”

“Yes,” I ventured, “I went to the mine, there was the sound of boring overhead. I set men to watch; I was at the desk, I heard shouting, after that I cannot remember.”

“They were all dead but you,” said the doctor.

“All dead,” I repeated. I liked the sound of this and so kept on mumbling “All dead, all dead.”

4

My plan was working nicely. But I realized I could not keep up this rôle for ever. Nor did I wish to, for the idleness and suspense were intolerable and I knew that I would rather face whatever problems my recovery involved than to continue in this monotonous and meaningless existence. So I convalesced by degrees and got about the hospital, and was permitted to wait on myself. But I cultivated a slowness and brevity of speech.

One day as I sat reading the attendant announced, "A visitor to see you, sir."

Trembling with excitement and fear I tensely waited the coming of the visitor.

Presently a stolid-faced young man followed the attendant into the room. "You remember Holknecht," said the nurse, "he is your assistant at the laboratory."

I stared stupidly at the man, and cold fear crept over me as he, with puzzled eyes, returned my gaze.

"You are much changed," he said at last. "I hardly recognize you."

"I have been very ill," I replied.

Just then the head physician came into the room and seeing me talking to a stranger walked over to us. As I said nothing, Holknecht introduced himself. The medical man began at once to enlarge upon the peculiarities of my condition. "The unknown gas," he explained, "acted upon the whole nervous system and left profound effects. Never in the records of the hospital has there been so strange a case."

Holknecht seemed quite awed and completely credulous.

"His memory must be revived," continued the head physician, "and that can best be done by recalling the dominating interest of his mind."

"Captain Armstadt was wholly absorbed in his research work in the laboratory," offered Holknecht.

"Then," said the physician, "you must revive the activity of those particular brain cells."

With that command the laboratory assistant was left in charge. He took his new task quite seriously. Turning to me and raising his voice as if to penetrate my dulled mentality, he began, "Do you not remember our work in the laboratory?"

"Yes, the laboratory, the laboratory," I repeated vaguely.

Holknecht described the laboratory in detail and gradually his talk drifted into an account of the chemical research. I listened eagerly to get the threads of the work I must needs do if I were to maintain my rôle as Armstadt.

Knowing now that visitors were permitted me, I again grew

apprehensive over the possible advent of Katrina. But no woman appeared, in fact I had not yet seen a woman among the Germans. Always it was Holknecht and, strictly according to his orders, he talked incessant chemistry.

5

The day I resumed my normal wearing apparel I was shown into a large lounging room for convalescents. I seated myself a short distance apart from a group of officers and sat eyeing another group of large, hulking fellows at the far end of the room. These I concluded to be common soldiers, for I heard the officers in my ward grumbling at the fact that they were quartered in the same hospital with men of the ranks.

Presently an officer came over and took a seat beside me. "It is very rarely that you men in the professional service are gassed," he said. "You must have a dull life, I do not see how you can stand it."

"But certainly," I replied, "it is not so dangerous."

"And for that reason it must be stupid--I, for one, think that even in the fighting forces there is no longer sufficient danger to keep up the military morale. Danger makes men courageous--without danger courage declines--and without courage what advantage would there be in the military life?"

"Suppose," I suggested, "the war should come to an end?"

"But how can it?" he asked incredulously. "How can there be an end to the war? We cannot prevent the enemy from fighting."

"But what," I ventured, "if the enemy should decide to quit fighting?"

"They have almost quit now," he remarked with apparent disgust; "they are losing the fighting spirit--but no wonder--they say that the World State population is so great that only two per cent of its men are in the fighting forces. What I cannot see is how a people so peaceful can keep from utter degeneration. And they say that the World State soldiers are not even bred for soldiering but are picked from all classes. If they should decide to quit fighting, as you suggest, we also would have to quit--it would intolerable--it is bad

enough now.”

“But could you not return to industrial life and do something productive?”

“Productive!” sneered the fighter. “I knew that you professional men had no courage--it is not to be expected--but I never before heard even one of your class suggest a thing like that--a military man do something productive! Why don’t you suggest that we be changed to women?” And with that my fellow patient rose and, turning sharply on his metal heel, walked away.

The officer’s attitude towards his profession set me thinking, and I found myself wondering how far it was shared by the common soldiers. The next day when I came out into the convalescent corridor I walked past the group of officers and went down among the men whose garments bore no medals or insignia. They were unusually large men, evidently from some specially selected regiment. Picking out the most intelligent looking one of the group I sat down beside him.

“Is this the first time you have been gassed?” I inquired.

“Third time,” replied the soldier.

“I should think you would have been discharged.”

“Discharged,” said the soldier, in a perplexed tone, “why I am only forty-four years old, why should I be discharged unless I get in an explosion and lose a leg or something?”

“But you have been gassed three times,” I said, “I should think they ought to let you return to civil life and your family.”

The soldier looked hard at the insignia of my rank as captain. “You professional officers don’t know much, do you? A soldier quit and do common labor, now that’s a fine idea. And a family! Do you think I’m a Hohenzollern?” At the thought the soldier chuckled. “Me with a family,” he muttered to himself, “now that’s a fine idea.”

I saw that I was getting on dangerous ground but curiosity prompted a further question: “Then, I suppose, you have nothing to hope for until you reach the age of retirement, unless war should come to an end?”

Again the soldier eyed me carefully. “Now you do have some queer ideas. There was a man in our company who used to talk like that when no officers were around. This fellow, his name was

Mannteufel, said he could read books, that he was a forbidden love-child and his father was an officer. I guess he was forbidden all right, for he certainly wasn't right in his head. He said that we would go out on the top of the ground and march over the enemy country and be shot at by the flying planes, like the roof guards, if the officers had heard him they would surely have sent him to the crazy ward--why he said that the war would be over after that, and we would all go to the enemy country and go about as we liked, and own houses and women and flying planes and animals. As if the Royal House would ever let a soldier do things like that."

"Well," I said, "and why not, if the war were over?"

"Now there you go again--how do you mean the war was over, what would all us soldiers do if there was no fighting?"

"You could work," I said, "in the shops."

"But if we worked in the shops, what would the workmen do?"

"They would work too," I suggested.

The soldier was silent for a time. "I think I get your idea," he said. "The Eugenic Staff would cut down the birth rates so that there would only be enough soldiers and workers to fill the working jobs."

"They might do that," I remarked, wishing to lead him on.

"Well," said the soldier, returning to the former thought, "I hope they won't do that until I am dead. I don't care to go up on the ground to get shot at by the fighting planes. At least now we have something over our heads and if we are going to get gassed or blown up we can't see it coming. At least--"

Just then the officer with whom I had talked the day before came up. He stopped before us and scowled at the soldier who saluted in hasty confusion.

"I wish, Captain," said the officer addressing me, "that you would not take advantage of these absurd hospital conditions to disrupt discipline by fraternizing with a private."

At this the soldier looked up and saluted again.

"Well?" said the officer.

"He's not to blame, sir," said the soldier, "he's off his head."