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A SONG OF THE LEGIONS

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The crystal gong of the silence
Shivers in shattered shards;
And the marble hall re-echoes
To the tread of the crested guards.

Fingers pluck at the hangings,
White in the purple gloam;
Midnight lies with the sleepers
In the pulsing heart of Rome.

Rosy lips smile in slumber
Arms nestle bodies white -
Rome in her silks and marbles
Sleeps through the soft-lipped night.

Echoing down the heather
The restless trumpets call,
Questioning each of the other
Down the line of the winding Wall.

Eyes strain hard in the darkness,
To the pulse of an echo blown -
Rome is of gold and iron
But a soldier is flesh and bone.

Fires in the hills are burning,
To the far off throb of a drum;
Through the ghostly waving heather
What phantom figures come?

Shadows or painted warriors?
The death drums never cease.
Stand to your watches, legion,
That Rome may sleep in peace.

Beacons burn in the towers,
Eyes straining hard beside,
Ears a-tune to the murmur,
The sigh of each changing tide.

Was that the shrill of a night bird
Where the waves are grey as steel,
Or the grind of a muffled oar-lock,
The wash of a prowling keel?

Driftwood or sword-fanged sea-wolves,
Not yours is rest or ease;
Stand to your watches, legion,
That Rome may sleep in peace.