

UNKNOWN

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FANTASY FICTION

Worlds

WET MAGIC by Henry Kuttner

Beneath a Welsh lake, safe from the enemies of a thousand years, Morgan le Fay had waited—and with her was Excalibur, Arthur's magic sword. Another Arthur—Arthur Woodley, American, ex-Hollywood actor, currently an A. E. F. pilot—found her there. Not that he meant to—a pair of Nazi Stukas took care of that. They, Vivienne, and Merlin, that is—



THE ANGELIC ANGLEWORM . by Fredric Brown

Charlie Wills had troubles. They began when the angleworm he was trying to collect for fishing bait sprouted wings, a halo, and flew heavenward. They included a duck where a duck couldn't be, a Rumanian coin—a remarkable series of peculiar events. Because of a most strange error—



THE WITCH by A. E. van Vogt

She was old and ugly and lonely, and she feared the sea and the night with a terrible horror. For she was of the sea—and she wanted just a bit more time to work her magic, the magic that would give her a new, younger body—



THE ULTIMATE WISH by E. M. Hull

She was crippled, twisted—twisted even more mentally than she was physically. Her world was made up of hates, lusts for revenge, savage passions, a deadly stew of mental poisons. And to her, by accident, came the power to make one and only one wish. What wish could she make that would yield her the greatest satisfaction?

U N K N O W N W O R L D S

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WET MAGIC

By Henry Kuttner

● It wasn't his intention to meet Merlin, nor Lady Vivienne—and least of all Morgan le Fay. But it was trying so desperately to get away from Morgan and her lake that finally led him to stalk her to her own room—

Illustrated by Kolliker

It happened in Wales, which, of course, was the logical place for Morgan le Fay to be. Not that Arthur Woodley expected to find the fabled enchantress there, of course. He was looking for something entirely different. In a word, safety.

With two Stukas hanging doggedly on the tail of his observation plane, despite the pea-soup fog that shrouded the craggy peaks of Wales, Woodley dodged and twisted frantically, his hard, handsome face set in lines of strain. It wasn't fair, he thought. This crate wasn't meant as a fighter, and needed another crewman anyway. Nazis weren't supposed to butt in on routine transfer flights.

Z-zoom!

Tracer bullets fanned Woodley's helmet. Why wouldn't those Stukas leave him alone? He hadn't been looking for them. If he had thought to find enemy aircraft in Wales, he'd have flown rapidly in the opposite direction. *Zoom* again. No use. The Stukas hung on. Woodley dived dangerously into the fog.

Damn—Hollywood arranged things better.

Woodley grinned mirthlessly. In the air battles he'd starred in in Paradox's "*Flight Wings*," he had the proper kind of a plane to work in. Say a Spitfire or a P-38. And—

Tut-tut-tut! Double-damn! This couldn't keep up much longer. Those Stukas were becoming familiar with all of Woodley's tricks—the *spang!* each slug made as it struck armor plate unpleasantly reminded him that these were not Hollywood blanks.

Tut-tut-tut-spang! He would have engaged one. Two of them made the odds unnecessarily heavy. Also, in this thick fog, it shouldn't be too difficult to escape—

The engine coughed and died. A bullet had found the fuel line, presumably. Woodley almost felt relieved. He banked the plane into an especially dense bank of fog, glanced back, and saw the Stukas following relentlessly. How far down was the ground?

He had to risk it, in any case. As he bailed out, some bullets screamed past, but none found a mark

in Woodley's body. The fog was denser lower down, and camouflaged the parachute so that there was no more gunfire.

The plane crashed, some distance away. The drone of the Stukas grew fainter as the Nazi planes circled away to the east, their job done. Woodley, swaying in the silk shrouds, peered down, straining his eyes to see what lay below.

A tree. He caromed off a branch, in a tremendous crackling and thumping, brought up with a terrific jolt, and hung breathless, slowly revolving. The silence of the fog closed in again. He could hear nothing but the low murmur of a rivulet somewhere in that blanketing grayness.

Woodley slipped out of his harness, climbed down, and drank brandy from a pocket flask before he looked around.

There was little to see. The fog was still thick, though he could make out the silhouettes of ghostly trees all around him. A forest, then. From where he stood, the ground sloped sharply down to where the unseen streamlets gurgled.

The brandy had made him thirsty for water, so Woodley stumbled through the murk till he almost fell into the stream. He drank, and then, shivering with cold, examined his surroundings more carefully.

Not far away grew an immense oak, gnarled and ancient, with a trunk as large as that of a California sequoia. Its exposed roots, where erosion had done its work, made a comfortable-looking burrow—or, rather cave; and at least it would provide shelter from the knifing wind. Woodley went forward warily and assured himself that the little den was empty. Fair enough.

He got down on all fours and backed into the hollow. Not far. Something kicked him in the pants, and Woodley described an arc that ended with his head in the brook. He bubbled a yell and sprang up, blinking icy water from his eyes. A bear—

There was no bear. Woodley remembered that he had scrutinized the cave of roots carefully, and he was certain it could have contained nothing larger than a fairly young mouse. And mice seldom, if ever, kick with noticeable effect.

It was curiosity that drew Woodley back to the scene of his humiliation. He peered in furtively. Nothing. Nothing at all. A springy root must have snapped back and struck him. It couldn't happen twice. Moreover, the wind was growing colder.

This time Woodley crawled in headfirst, and this time he was kicked in the face.

Rising rapidly from the brook, Woodley thought wildly of invisible kangaroos. He stood motionless, staring at that notably empty cave of roots. Then he drank brandy.

Logic came to his aid. He had been through an unpleasant nervous ordeal. Little wonder that

he was imagining things now. Nevertheless, he did not make a third attempt to invade the burrow. Instead, he went rather hastily downstream. The watercourse should lead somewhere.

The parachute descent into the tree had bruised him a bit, so presently Woodley sat down to rest. The swirling gray fog made him slightly dizzy. The dark column of the trees seemed to move with a wavering, half-animate life of their own. Woodley lay back, closing his eyes. He didn't like Wales. He didn't like this mess he was in. He—

Someone kissed him full on the lips.

Automatically Woodley responded before he realized what was happening. Then he opened his eyes to see a slim, lovely girl rising from where she had knelt beside him. He had not heard her approach—

"Well—" he said. "Hello!" The girl was singularly beautiful, dark-haired, with a fillet of gold about her brow. She wore a robe that reached her ankles, but Woodley could see that her figure was eminently satisfactory.

"You smell of Merlin," she said.

"I . . . uh . . . I do?" murmured Woodley, feeling vaguely insulted. He got up, staring. Curious costumes they wore in this part of the country. Maybe—*yipe!*—maybe he wasn't even in England!

He asked the girl about that, and she shook her head. "This is Wales." There was a puzzled frown drawing together the dark line of her brows. "Who are you? You remind me of . . . someone—"

"Arthur Woodley. I'm flying for the A. E. F. You must have seen some of my pictures—eh?"

"Merlin could fly," she remarked cryptically.

Baffled, Woodley suddenly recollected that a Merlin was a bird—a sort of falcon, he thought. That explained it. "I didn't see you come up," he said. "You live near here?"

The girl chuckled softly. "Oh, I'm usually invisible. No one can see me or touch me unless I want them to. And my name is Vivienne."

"It's a lovely name," Woodley said, automatically going into his routine. "It suits you."

Vivienne said, "Not for years have I felt passion for any man. Is it because you remind me of Merlin? I think I love you, Arthur."

Woodley swallowed. Curious customs they had in Wales! But he'd have to be careful not to insult the girl—after all he was lost, and her services as a guide would be invaluable.

There was no need to speak. Vivienne went on swiftly.

"I live not far from here. Under the lake. My home and I are yours. Provided you pass the testing, of course. But, since you can fly, you will not be afraid of any task Morgan may set you—so?"

"Why—" Woodley hesitated, and then glanced

around him at the chilly grayness of the fog. "Why, I'd love to go with you, Vivienne," he amplified hastily. "I . . . I suppose you live with your parents?"

"They have long been dust. Do you come with me of your own free will?"

"It's a pleasure."

"Say it—your own free will," Vivienne insisted, her dark eyes glowing.

Woodley complied, definitely puzzled, but willing to play along, since it obviously could do no harm. The girl smiled like an angel. "Now you are mine," she said. "Or you will be, when you have passed Morgan's testing. Come! It is not far, but—shall we fly?"

"Why not?" Woodley countered, grinning. "Let's go."

Vivienne obeyed. She lifted her arms, stood on tiptoe, and rose gently from the ground, swaying slightly in the breeze. Woodley remained perfectly motionless, looking at the spot where she had been.

Then he started violently, cast a quick glance around, and finally, with the utmost reluctance, tilted back his head.

There she was, floating down the gorge, looking back over her shoulder. "This way!" her silvery voice came back.

Automatically Woodley turned around and began to walk away. His eyes were slightly glazed. He was brooding over hallucinations—

"My love!" a voice cried from above.

There was a *swoosh* in the air behind him, reminding Woodley of a Stuka. He whirled, trying to dodge, and fell headlong into the stream. His temple thumped solidly against a rounded stone—and unconsciousness was definitely a relief.

He was back in his Bel-Air home, Woodley thought, waking up between silk sheets, with an ice pack on his head. The ice pack was refreshing, almost eliminating a dull, throbbing ache. A hangover—

He remembered. It wasn't a hangover. He had fallen, and struck his head. But what had happened before that? Vivienne . . . *oh!* With a sickish feeling in his middle, Woodley recalled her words, and they had assumed a new and shocking significance.

But it couldn't be true—

His eyelids snapped open. He was in bed, yes; but it wasn't his bed, and he was looking up into the face of a . . . thing.

Superficially she was a girl, unadorned, and with a singularly excellent figure. But she was made of green jello. Her unbound hair looked like very fine seaweed, and floated in a cloud about her head. She drew back at Woodley's movement, withdrawing her hand—which the man had mistaken for an ice pack.

"My lord," she said, bowing low.

"Dream?" Woodley muttered incoherently. "Must be. Wake up pretty soon. Green jello . . . technicolor—" He tapered off vaguely, looking around. He was between sheets of finest silk; the room itself had no windows, but a cool, colorless radiance filled it. The air was quite clear, yet it seemed to have—thickened. Woodley could trace the tiny currents in it, and the swirls as he sat up. The sheets fell away from his bare torso.

"D-dream," said Woodley, not believing it for a moment.

"My lord," said the green maiden, bowing again. Her voice was sweet and rather bubbly. "I am Nurmala, a naiad, here to serve you."

Woodley experimentally pinched himself. It hurt. He reached out to seize Nurmala's arm, and a horrifying thing happened. The naiad girl not only looked like jelly—she was jelly. It felt like squeezing a sack filled with cold mush. Cold and loathsome.

"The Lady Vivienne ordered me to watch over you," Nurmala said, apparently unhurt. Her arm had resumed its normal contour. Woodley noticed that she seemed to waver around the edges as she went on. "Before sundown you must pass the testing Morgan le Fay has set you, and you will need all your mettle to do that."

"What?" Woodley didn't quite comprehend.

"You must slay that which lairs behind Shaking Rock," Nurmala said. "Morgan—made it—this morning, and placed it there, for your testing. I swam out and saw—" She caught herself, with a quick glance around, and said swiftly, "But how can I serve you, lord?"

Woodley rubbed his eyes. "I . . . am I dreaming? Well, I want some clothes. And where am I?"

Nurmala went away, seeming to glide rather than walk, and returned with a bundle of garments, which Woodley took and examined. There was a knee-length blue samite tunic, with gold bands of embroidery upon it, linen drawers, long fawn-colored hose with leather soles, and a belt with a dagger in its sheath attached. On the bosom of the tunic was a design of a coiled snake with a golden star above its upraised, threatening head.

"Will you don them, lord? You are not dreaming—no."

Woodley had already realized that. He was certainly awake, and his surroundings were quite as certainly—unearthly. The conclusions were obvious.

Meanwhile, he'd feel better with pants on. "Sure," he said. "I'll don them." Then he waited. Nurmala also waited, cocking her head to one side in an interested way. Finally Woodley gave up, dragged the drawers under the sheets, and struggled into them in that position with some diffi-

culty. Nurmala seemed disappointed, but said nothing.

So Vivienne's words had been literally true! Good Lord, what a spot! Still—Woodley's eyes narrowed speculatively as he adjusted his tunic. Once you took the initial improbable premise for granted, you were far safer. Magic—*hm-m-m*. In folklore and legends, humans had generally come off second best in encounters with fairy folk. The reason seemed fairly obvious. A producer could usually outbluff a Hollywood actor. The actor felt—was made to feel—his limitations. And supernatural beings, Woodley thought, had a habit of depending to a great extent on their unearthly background. It was sound psychology. Get the other fellow worried, and the battle is more than half won.

But if the other fellow didn't bluff—if he kept his feet solidly on the ground, and used his head—the results should be different. Woodley hoped so. What had Vivienne—and Nurmala, the naiaid—said about a testing? It sounded dangerous.

He held out his hand. Quite steady. And, now that he was dressed, Woodley felt more confident. "Where's a mirror?" he asked. Concentration on such down-to-earth details would help his mental attitude—

"Our queen dislikes them," the naiaid murmured. "There are none beneath the lake. But you cut a gallant figure, lord."

"Lake? Queen? You mean Vivienne?"

"Oh, no," said Nurmala, rather shocked. "Our queen is Morgan le Fay." She touched the embroidered snake design on Woodley's breast with a translucent forefinger. "The Queen of Air and Darkness. She rules, of course, and we all serve her—even the Lady Vivienne, who is high in favor."

Morgan le Fay. Remembrance came to Woodley. He had a kaleidoscopic picture of knights in armor, distressed maidens shut up in towers, the Round Table, Lancelot and Arthur—Vivienne! Didn't the legend say that Vivienne was the girl with whom the wizard Merlin had fallen in love? And Morgan le Fay was the evil genius of the Arthurian cycle, the enchantress who hated the king, her half-brother, so bitterly—

"Look," Woodley said. "Just how—"

"*I hight Bohart!*"

The words didn't make sense. But they came from someone who, at least, looked human, despite his costume, almost a duplicate of Woodley's. The man stood before a curtain that billowed with his passing, and his ruddy, long mustache bristled with fury. Over his tunic he wore a gleaming metal cuirass, and in his hand was a bare sword.

Nurmala bubbled faintly and retreated with a wish. "My lord Bohart—"

"Silence, naiaid!" the other thundered, glaring

at Woodley. "I name you knave, lackey, lick-spittle, and traitor! Yes, you!"

Woodley looked helplessly at Nurmala. "It is Sir Bohart," she said unhappily. "The Lady Vivienne will be furious."

But it was the obvious fury of Sir Bohart himself that worried Woodley—that, and the sharp-edged sword. If—

"Draw!" the knight roared.

Nurmala interposed a tremulous objection. "He has no sword. It is not meet—"

Sir Bohart gobbled into his mustache and cast his blade away. From his belt he whipped a dagger that was the counterpart of Woodley's. "We are even now," he said, with horrid satisfaction. "Well?"

"Say you yield," Nurmala whispered. "Quick!"

"I yield," Woodley repeated obediently. The knight was not pleased.

"Knave! To yield without a struggle—Ha! Are you a knight?"

"No," Woodley said before he thought, and Nurmala gasped in horror.

"My lord! No knight? But Sir Bohart can slay you now without dishonor!"

Bohart was moving forward, his dagger glittering, a pleased smile on his scarred face. "She speaks sooth. Now shall I slit your weasand."

It sounded unpleasant. Woodley hastily put the bed between himself and the advancing knight. "Now wait a minute," he said firmly. "I don't even know who you are. Why should we fight?"

Sir Bohart had not paused. "Craven dog! You take the Lady Vivienne from me, and then seek to placate me. No!"

They circled the bed, while the naiaid bubbled a faint scream and fled. Robbed of even that slight moral support, Woodley felt his knees weaken. "I didn't take Vivienne," he urged. "I only just met her."

Sir Bohart said, between his teeth, "For centuries I have dwelt here beneath the lake, since Arthur fell at Salisbury Plain. The Lady Vivienne loved me then—and in a hundred years I bored her. She turned to the study of goety. But I have been faithful, knowing always that some time I would win her back. Without a rival, I was sure of it. Now you have come to lure her from me—lackey cur! Ah-h!" The dagger's sweep ripped cloth from Woodley's sleeve as he nimbly dodged and caught up a metal vase from a tabouret. He hurled it at Bohart's head. The vase bounced back without touching the knight.

More magic, apparently.

"Maybe I am dreaming, after all," Woodley groaned, jumping back.

"I thought that myself, for a while," Bohart said conversationally, leaping across the bed and slashing out with his weapon. "Later, I knew I was not. Will you draw?"

Woodley unsheathed his dagger. He ducked under Sir Bohart's thrust and slashed up at the knight's arm. It was like striking at glass. His point slid off harmlessly, and only by a frantic writhe was he able to avoid being impaled.

How the devil could he fight against this sort of magic?

"Look," he said, "I don't want Vivienne."

"You dare to insult my lady," the knight belated, crimson-faced, as he plunged forward. "By the spiked tail of Sathanas, I'll—"

"Sir Bohart!" It was Vivienne's voice, iron under the velvet. She was standing at the curtain, Nurmala quivering behind her. "Hold!"

"Nay, nay," Bohart puffed. "This knave is not fit for black beetles to eat. Have no fear for me; I can slay him easily."

"And I promise to slay you if you harm him, despite your magic cuirass that can turn all blows!" Vivienne shrieked. "Let be, I say! Let be! Else—"

Sir Bohart hesitated, sending a wary glance at the girl. He looked toward the shrinking Woodley and snarled silently.

Vivienne said, "Must I summon Morgan?"

The knight's face went gray as weathered stone. He swung around, a sick horror in his eyes.

"My lady—" he said.

"I have protected you till now, for old time's sake. Often the queen has wanted a partner to play at chess—and often she has asked me for you. In truth, there are few humans beneath the lake, and I would be sorry to lose your company, Bohart. But Morgan has not played at chess for long and long."

The knight slowly sheathed his dagger. He licked his lips. Silently he went to the hanging drapery, passed through, and was gone.

"Perhaps Bleys should bleed him," Nurmala suggested. "Sir Bohart grows more choleric each day."

Vivienne had lost her angry look. She smiled mockingly at the green girl.

"So you can get the blood, eh? You naiads. You'd strip yourself clean for a drop of human blood, if you weren't stripped already." Her voice changed. "Go now. My new gown must be ready, for we sup with Morgan le Fay tonight after the testing."

As Nurmala vanished, Vivienne came forward and put her arms around Woodley's neck. "I am sorry for this, messire. Sir Bohart will not offend again. He is fiercely jealous—but I never loved him. For a little time I amused myself, some centuries ago—that was all. It is you I love, my Arthur, you alone."

"Look," Woodley said, "I'd like a little information. Where am I, for one thing?"

"But do you not know?" Vivienne looked puz-

zled. "When you said you could fly, I felt sure you were at least a wizard. Yet when I brought you here, I found you could not breathe under water—I had to ask Morgan to change you."

"Change me?" Instinctively Woodley fingered his throat.

The girl laughed softly. "You have no gills. Morgan's magic works more subtly. You have been—altered—so that you can live under water. The element is as air to you. It is the same enchantment Morgan put upon this castle when she sank it in the lake, after Camelot fell and the long night came upon Britain. An old enchantment—she put it upon Lyonesse once, and lived there for a while."

"And I thought all that was just legend," Woodley muttered.

"How little you mortals know! And yet it is true—in some strange paradoxical way. Morgan told me once, but I did not understand. Well, you can ask her tonight, after the testing."

"Oh—the testing. I'm not too happy about that. What is it, anyway?"

Vivienne looked at him with some surprise. "An ancient chivalric custom. Before any man can dwell here, he must prove himself worthy by doing some deed of valor. Sir Bohart had to slay a Worm—a dragon, you know—but his magic cuirass helped him there. He's quite invulnerable while he wears it."

"Just what is this testing?"

"It is different for each knight. Morgan has made some being, with her sorcery, and placed it behind the Shaking Rock. Ere sundown, you must go and kill the creature, whatever it is. I would I knew what manner of thing lairs there, but I do not, nor would Morgan let me tell you if I knew."

Woodley blinked. "Uh . . . suppose I don't want to take the test?"

"You must, or Morgan will slay you. But surely you are not afear'd, my lord!"

"Of course not," he said hastily. "Just tell me a little more, will you? Are we really living under water?"

Vivienne sighed, pressed Woodley down to a sitting position on the bed, and relaxed comfortably in his lap. "Kiss me," she said. "There! Now—well, after the Grail was lost and the table broken, magic went out of Britain. There was no room for the fairy folk. Some died, some went away, some hid, here and there. There are secrets beneath the hills of Britain, my Arthur. So Morgan, with her powers, made herself invisible and intangible, and sank her castle here under the lake, in the wild mountains of Wales. Her servants are not human, of course. I had done Morgan a service once, and she was grateful. So when I saw the land sinking into savagery, I asked to go with her to this safe place. I brought Bohart with me,

and Morgan took Merlin's old master, Bleys the Druid. Since then nothing has changed. Humans cannot feel or see us—or you either, now that you have been enchanted."

"Merlin?" Woodley was remembering the legend. "Didn't you shut him up in an oak—" He stopped, realizing that he had made a *faux pas*. But it was so damnably hard to realize that legend had become real!"

Vivienne's face changed. "I loved him," she said, and her lips pinched together. "We will not speak of that!"

Woodley was thinking hard. Apparently he was breathing water, though he didn't notice any difficulty with his lungs. Yet there was an extraordinary—*thickness*—to the atmosphere, and a glassy, pellucid clarity. Moreover, the angles of refraction were subtly alien. It was true, then.

"So I'm living in a legend."

She smiled. "It was real for all that, in a way. I remember. Such scandals we had in Camelot! I recall once Launcelot rescued a girl named Elaine, who'd been shut up in a boiling bath in a tower for years and years—she said. I got the truth of it later. It was all over the court. Elaine was married to an old knight—a very old knight—and when she heard Launcelot was in town, she decided to hook him. So she sent her page to Launcelot with a cock-and-bull story about a curse—said her husband wasn't her husband at all, but a wicked magician—and had a bath all ready in the tower, for the right moment. When Launcelot broke down the door, she hopped into the tub, naked as a needle, and yelled like the Questing Beast. It hurt, certes, but Elaine didn't mind that. Especially when her husband rushed in. She pointed at him and cried, 'The wizard!' So Launcelot drew his sword and made Elaine a widow. Not that it did her any good, with Guenevere in Camelot waiting for her lover. Though Guenevere had reason for behaving as she did, I think. The way Arthur behaved with Morgause! Of course that was before he married, but just the same—

"Legends, indeed," went on Vivienne. "I know legends! I suppose they gloss over the truth nowadays. Well, I could tell them a thing or two! I'll wager they've even made a hero out of that notorious old rake Lot. He certainly got what was coming to him. Indeed yes! But bad blood tells, I always feel. There was King Anguish, with his hunting lodge in the forest, and his unicorn hunts. Oh, yes!

"Unicorn hunts, forsooth," said Vivienne. "It's true you need a virgin to lure the unicorn, but there weren't many horns Anguish of Ireland brought home, I can tell you! And look at his daughter Yseult! She was her father all over again. She and Tristan—a minstrel! Everybody knows about minstrels. True enough, Yseult's husband wasn't any Galahad. Not Mark! For that

matter, let me tell you about Galahad. It wasn't only the bar that was sinister about him. They say that over in Bedgraine Forest one hot summer—"

Nurmala's bubbling voice interrupted. The naiaid stood by the drape that masked the door.

"My lady, I have done all that I can to the gown without you. But it must be fitted."

"Lackaday!" said Vivienne, rising. "I'll tell you about Uther and that widow some other time. Ten children, mind! Well, you need not go to the Shaking Rock till after midday meal, so would you like to view the castle?"

"Now wait a minute!" Woodley was beginning to feel anxious. "About this testing, Vivienne—"

"It is simple. You gird on a sword, go to the Shaking Rock—someone will guide you—and slay whatever creature Morgan has created there. Then you come back to sup."

"Just like that, eh?" Woodley said, with rather feeble irony. "But how do I know a sword will kill the thing? Suppose it's a dragon?"

Nurmala gave a quickly suppressed giggle. Woodley glanced at the naiaid, remembering something she had let drop earlier. What was it? Nurmala had begun to say that she had swum out and seen—

The creature behind the Shaking Rock? Woodley's eyes widened. He could make use of the naiaid!

Not yet, of course. There was still plenty of time. It would be better to familiarize himself with the aqueous life of the castle first.

Vivienne said, "Shall I have Bleys show you around?"

Bleys? The Druid wizard—not a bad idea. He might be a valuable source of information, and perhaps something more. If one could use magic to fight magic—

Not that Woodley had any intention of visiting the Shaking Rock, he pondered. At the first opportunity, he was getting out of this place. He could swim. If Bleys would show him the front door, he'd show Bleys a clean pair of heels.

"Fine," Woodley said. "Let's go."

Vivienne swept to the door. "Nurmala will take you to Bleys. Do not linger, naiaid. That gown must be finished—"

She was gone. Woodley waited till the sound of soft footfalls had died. Nurmala was eyeing him curiously.

"My lord—"

He stopped her with an outthrust arm and closed the door with the other. "Just a minute. I want to talk to you."

The naiaid's green jello face became slightly tinged with blue. She was blushing, Woodley surmised, and gulped. He went on swiftly:

"I want you to tell me what's behind the Shaking Rock."

Nurmala looked away. "How can I do that? Only Morgan knows."

"You swam out there this morning, didn't you? I thought so. Well, I'm not blaming you for curiosity, especially since I need the information. Come on, now. Give. What is it? A dragon?" he hazarded.

The naiad shivered around the edges. "Nay, my lord, I dare not say. If Morgan were to find out—"

"She won't."

"I cannot tell you!"

Woodley took out his dagger and touched the point to his arm. Nurmala watched with suddenly avid eyes.

"Vivienne said naiads were crazy about human blood. Like vampires, eh? Even for a drop or two—"

Take the root of a mandrake and squeeze out the juice. That will bring the undine posthaste, if it tries to hide from you."

"Catnip," Woodley said cryptically. "Well, at least I know what the thing is."

"You will not tell Morgan I told you? You promised!"

"I won't tell her. . . *Hm-m-m!* I wonder if—"

Nurmala jumped. "I have kept the Lady Vivienne waiting. Come, now, my lord. Quickly!"

Woodley thoughtfully followed the naiad into a tapestried hall, and along it to a carved door, which Nurmala pushed open. "Bleys!" she called.

"Bip!"

"Drunken oaf of a Druid," the naiad said impatiently. "There is a task for you."

"Has the dragon's fire gone out again?" a



"No! No! I dare not—"

Woodley pricked his finger—

"Well," said Nurmala some time later, "it's this way. Morgan le Fay created an undine and placed it behind the Shaking Rock."

"What's an undine?"

"It's about fifteen feet long, and—like hair," the naiad explained, licking her lips.

"Like hair?"

"You can't see its body, which is very small. It's covered with long hairy filaments that burn like fire when they touch you."

"I see," Woodley nodded grimly. "A super-Portuguese man-of-war. Electric jellyfish. Nice thing to fight with a sword!"

"It is a demon," Nurmala agreed. "But you will slay it easily."

"Oh, sure. Any idea how?"

"I fear not. I can tell you how to find it, though.

squeaky voice asked, rather plaintively. "By Mider, a salamander would be more dependable. But I suppose the water keeps putting the fire out. I keep telling the dragon not to take such deep breaths. *Bip!*"

"This is Messire Arthur of Woodley. Show him the castle. He is the Lady Vivienne's lover," Nurmala added as an afterthought, and Woodley blushed hotly.

It was very dark in the chamber. Sea spiders had spun webs all around, and it looked very much like an ancient alchemist's chamber, which it was. There were stacks of heavy tomes, a crucible or two, several alembics, a stuffed crocodile, and Bleys.

Bleys was a withered little gnome of a man, wispy enough to be blown away by a vagrant gust of wind. His dirty white beard hung in the aqueous atmosphere like a veil before his wrinkled

brown walnut of a face. Bleys wore a long mud-colored robe with a peaked hood, and he sat cross-legged, an earthenware jug in his skinny hands.

"Messire Arthur of Woodley," Bleys squeaked. "Greeting. *Bip!*" He drank from the jug. "*Bip!* again."

Woodley said at random, "You've . . . uh . . . got a nice place here." It would be wise to make friends with the Druid, as a first step in enlisting his aid.

Bleys waved casually at the alembics and retorts. "Those. Used to do all sorts of magic with 'em. Philosopher's Stone—you know. But not now. I just make liquor. *Bip!*"

"Liquor?"

"All sorts. Mead, wine—all by magic, of course. Real liquor wouldn't last long under water—you know. *Bip!* I haven't been drunk since I came down here with Morgan. Magic ale hasn't got the kick of the real stuff. *Eheu!*"

"Bleys," Nurmala murmured.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes." The wizard peered bleakly through his beard. "Vivienne wants me to show you around. Not worth it. Dull place, the castle. How'd you like to stay here with me instead and have a few drinks?"

As Woodley hesitated, the naiad said, "I'll tell the Lady Vivienne, Bleys."

"Oh, all right." The Druid stiffly rose and moved unsteadily forward. "Come along, then, Messire Arthur. Arthur . . . Arthur?" He squinted up sharply at Woodley's face. "For a moment I thought . . . but you're not Pendragon. There was a prophecy, you know, that he'd come again. Get along with you, Nurmala, or I'll turn you into a polliwog and step on you."

"You'll show Messire Arthur the castle, now?"

"Yes, yes," Bleys said snappishly. As Nurmala rippled away, he made an angry sound in his beard. "They all kick me around. Even the damned naiads. But why not?" He drank from the jug. "I'm just an old has-been. Me, who taught Merlin all he knew. They hate me because I won't work magic for them. Why should I? I make this instead. Have a drink. "No," he added hastily, drawing back. "You can't have any. I made it, and it's mine. Not that it'll get me drunk! Magic ale, forsooth! Sometimes I wish I were dead. *Bip!*"

He headed for the door, Woodley at his heels. "What do you want to see first?"

"I don't know. There'll be plenty of time to look around after I pass the testing. You know about that, don't you?"

Bleys nodded. "Oh, yes. But I don't know what sort of creature Morgan put behind the Shaking Rock." He glanced up shrewdly. "Before you go on—I can't help you. I can't give you any magic, because the queen won't let me, and I've no valuable information you'd be glad to hear.

The only thing I have to give is a sword, and I'm holding that for—one who will come later." His voice had changed oddly. "You must meet the testing with true courage, and that will be your shield."

"Thanks," Woodley said, his lips twisting wryly. No information, eh? Well, Bleys must know how to get out of the castle. Yet that secret must be wormed out of him subtly. He couldn't ask point-blank—

"Well," the Druid said, guiding Woodley along the hall, "the place is built in a hollow square, around the courtyard in the middle. No windows. The fishes are worse than mosquitoes. Snatch the food out of your hands. We keep the dragon in the courtyard. Scavenger. He takes care of the garbage problem. *Bip!*"

Vague memories of museums stirred in Woodley. "I don't see any suits of armor."

"Thank you'll need one?" Bleys cackled unpleasantly. "They're in the armory." He toddled unsteadily on with a certain grim fortitude. "This isn't Joyeuse Garde or the Castle of the Burning Hart. Environment's different. No pots of lead for melting on our towers. We can't be besieged. For that matter, the whole design of a castle is functional, quite useless under the lake."

"Why don't things get wet?"

"Same reason the water seems like air. Wet magic. That type of enchantment was perfected in Atlantis—it's beyond me, but I'm a Druid. We work with fire mostly. Oak, ash, and thorn," Bleys reminisced. "When I was a boy at Stonehenge . . . oh, well. *Sic transit*—you know. *Bip.* Mider curse this ale—it's like dish water. How I've longed for a sip of dry-land liquor! But of course I can't live out of water now. What are you looking at? Oh, that. Recognize the scene?" The Druid tittered unpleasantly.

Woodley was examining a great tapestry that covered one wall of the room they had just entered. Faded and ancient, but still brilliantly colored, it was covered with scenes that evoked a familiar note. A man and a woman—a tree—a snake—and, in the background, another woman who was strikingly beautiful even through this medium.

"Lilith," Bleys said. "The castle's full of tapestries. They show legends, battles, sieges—you know." He peered through the veil of his floating beard. "*Ars longa*—but the rest of the tag isn't exactly appropriate, eh? *Bip!*"

"Come along," he added, and tugged at his guest's arm.

It was not a leisurely tour of the castle. Bleys was impatient, and willing to pause only when he wanted a drink. Woodley was towed about willy-nilly, seldom catching a clear glimpse of anything.

But he managed to form some sort of picture of the place.

Built three stories high around a central courtyard, the castle came to a climax in the enormous donjon keep whose great square height dominated one angle of the building. Across the court from it was a barbican—two huge towers with the gateway recessed between them, guarded by a lowered portcullis through which an occasional fish swam lazily, and a futilely lifted drawbridge that had once spanned a vanished moat. Woodley saw this from the tower of the keep—the first time he had emerged from within the castle itself. And the ground was unpleasantly far down.

The lake bottom, rather. What he wanted to find was a door—an exit!

Water was like air to him, Woodley remembered. So a jump from the top of the keep would mean, in all probability, breaking his neck.

"Come on," said Bleys impatiently. "Let's go down."

There were great bare halls with galleries, there were storerooms and kitchens and barracks and dormitories. The smaller apartments were few. They passed a cobwebby still room where sea spiders had veiled loaded shelves behind wavering curtains of web. Bleys remarked that Morgan le Fay once amused herself by distilling potions and poisons, but she never used such clumsy devices nowadays.

An idea was beginning to stir in Woodley's mind. He asked questions.

"That? An alembic. That? Staghorn with gum Arabic. For childbirth, mostly. That jar's got dried bedbugs in it. Mastic, snakeroot, fennel, mandrake, musk, medlar tree bark—"

Mandrake. Remembering what Nurmala had told him, Woodley edged closer.

"And that thing over there?"

"That's a Witch's Cradle. It's used—"

Woodley deftly annexed the mandrake, slipping it into his tunic. So far, so good. All that now remained was to work out a method of using the root effectively. If only undines were afraid of mandrake, instead of being attracted to it! Well, if worse came to worst, he might distract the monster's attention with the root, somehow, while he made his escape—

"Come along. *Bip.*"

Presently they were on a little balcony overlooking the courtyard. "There's the dragon," Bleys said. "Draedan. It's an Anglo-Saxon name, and Anglo-Saxon was unpopular in our day—but so were dragons. See all that rubbish?"

There were amorphous ruins rising from the silt at the edge of the courtyard, and a larger mound in the center.

"Stables, falcon mews, cattle barns, a chapel—once. Not that anybody ever worshiped in that

chapel. Morgan—you know. Air and Darkness. *Bip!*" Bleys stared reflectively into his jug. "Come along."

"Wait," Woodley said rebelliously. "I want to look at the dragon." Actually, he was hoping to find an exit from this vantage point.

"Oh, Draedan. That worm. Very well." The Druid slipped down to a sitting position and closed his eyes. "*Bip.*"

Woodley's gaze was inevitably drawn to the dragon—a truly startling spectacle. It looked vaguely like a stegosaurus, with waving hackles on its arched back, and a long, spiked tail with a knob at the end. The head, however, was not the tiny one of a herbivorous dinosaur. It was a mixture of crocodile and tyrannosaurus rex, three horns atop the nose, and a cavernous mouth as large as a subway kiosk. It was as long as two streetcars, and twice as high. Glowing yellow eyes glared lambently. A gush of flame shot out from the horror's mouth as Draedan breathed.

Just then, the grimly monster was eating garbage, in a somewhat finicky fashion.

Woodley wondered how its fiery breath could burn under water, and then remembered Morgan's magic. If he could improvise a flame thrower to use against the undine—but how? He watched a gush of bubbles drift up each time the flame rippled out. Hordes of little fishes were trying to swipe Draedan's dinner.

Clumsy on its columnar legs, the dragon would retaliate by breathing heavily upon its tormentors, who fled from the fire. Bleys woke up to say, "That creature's got its troubles. It hates cooked food, but by the time it chases those fish off, all the garbage is well roasted. I'd put its flame out for good, but a dragon needs fire in its stomach to digest its food. Something to do with metabolism. Wish I could put out the fire in my stomach," he added, and, after drinking from the jug and bipping reflectively, went to sleep again.

Woodley leaned upon the balcony and examined the dragon with fascinated horror. The slow movements of the saurian—all dragons are saurians—gave it a peculiarly nightmare appearance. It looked like a Hollywood technician's creation, rather badly done, and far from convincing.

At that moment, someone seized Woodley about the knees, lifted him, and hurled him bodily over the balcony.

He fell with a thud in cushioning soft ooze. A cloud of silt billowed up as Woodley sprang to his feet. Not a yard from his nose, a lake trout hung suspended with waving motions of its fins, eyeing him thoughtfully. Other fish, attracted by the commotion, swam toward Woodley, whose heart had prolapsed into his sandals.

As the silt-cloud cleared, Draedan became visi-

ble. The dragon had turned his head to stare straight at Woodley.

Draeden yawned ferily.

He lifted one tree-trunk leg and began to move ponderously forward.

"Bleys!" Woodley roared. "*Bleys! Help!*"

There was no answer—not even a bip. "*Bleys! Wake up!*"

Then he ran. There was a closed door in the wall near Woodley, and he fled toward it. Draedan was not far behind, but the saurian moved slowly and clumsily.

"*Bleys!*"

The door was locked, quite firmly, from the inside. Woodley groaned and dodged as Draedan lumbered on, resistless as an army tank.

"*Bleys!*"

There was another door across the courtyard. Woodley sprinted toward it. He could hear lumbering footsteps behind him.

But this door, too, was locked.

Flattened against it, Woodley looked back with narrowed, calculating eyes. A trail of silt hung wavering in the water to mark his trail. Through it Draedan came, yellow eyes shining like fog lamps, flame bursting from his mouth.

"*Bleys! Wake up!*"

Still no response. Springing away, Woodley tripped over a stone buried in the mud, and a cloud of ooze leaped up around him. As he hastily rose, an idea flashed into his mind.

A smoke screen—

He ran, scuffing his feet. Silt billowed up. Draedan's behemoth progress helped, too. Yelling occasionally at Bleys, Woodley circled the courtyard and then crossed his own trail, stirring up a murky barrage. Within a few minutes the water was as opaque as pea soup.

Yet Draedan did not give up. His feet thumped on, and his glowing disks of eyes swam out of the dimness with horrifying frequency. Woodley was too winded now to shout. But if he could keep on dodging long enough—Draedan could not possibly see him now—

The dragon had other ideas. Abruptly a long tongue of flame flashed out murkily. Almost immediately it came again. Woodley ran.

Draedan breathed heavily. Fire trails lanced through the silt fog. Apparently the dragon had realized that there was more than one way of skinning a cat—or getting his dinner. Once one of those fiery gusts found him, Woodley knew, he would be reduced to cinders. It was ridiculous to be incinerated under water, he thought moodily as he sped on his frantic way.

The silt particles made him cough. He crashed against the grilled metal of the barbican and hung there, gasping. Iron, rusty and weak, bent under his weight, leaving a gap in the barrier.

Draedan's headlight eyes glowed out of the

murk. With grim desperation Woodley wrenched at more bars. They, too, were fragile and corroded, and came away easily. As the dragon charged, Woodley dived head first through the hole he had made in the barbican. Flame singed his drawers.

He seemed, however, to be still cornered. The drawbridge was raised, and hung like a slightly slanted wall above him. But the difficulty was only an apparent one, as Woodley found when he slipped sidewise past the edge of the bridge. He was in the open, outside the wall—and there was no moat to keep him from escaping.

He was on the lake bottom. Behind him and above, the castle of Morgan le Fay rose like a crag. It was no longer a prison—

Woodley listened. Draedan had apparently given up the chase. And Bleys was presumably still asleep. Best of all, the way to freedom was open. That tumble into the courtyard had been a blessing in disguise.

Well—fair enough! Woodley sighed with relief. He would not have to face that unpleasant testing involving the undine. Instead, he hurried away from the castle.

Rounded stones felt hard through the leather soles of his hose. The ground slanted up sharply. And, as he went on, he realized that the lake was, as well as he could tell, bowl-shaped, and very deep. The castle was in the deepest part.

He wondered where the Shaking Rock lay. Not that he wanted to go there—now!

Briefly he found himself regretting Vivienne, who had been quite lovely. Her face in his mind was vivid, but not enticing enough to slow down his steady climb. He went through a forest of water weeds—no great hindrance—and was trailed by a school of inquisitive minnows. From above, a cool blue light drifted down.

Higher he went, and higher. Far above, he could see a flat shining plate—a bright sky rimmed by a circular horizon. It was the surface.

His head was almost above water now. He could see a rocky shore, and trees—oddly distorted, with fantastic perspective. A water bug dived to look at him, and then departed hastily.

Then Woodley's head broke the surface, and he started to strangle.

Air gushed into his nostrils, his mouth, his lungs, carrying little knife blades of agony. He coughed and choked, lost his balance, and fell, the water closing over his head. It was pure ecstasy. Woodley sat where he had fallen, gasping, watching air bubbles cascade from his mouth and nostrils. Presently there were no more, and he felt better.

Of course. He might have expected this. But—Good Lord!

Morgan had changed him, so that water was now

his natural element. Air was as fatal to him now as it would be to a fish.

The thing was manifestly ridiculous and horribly logical. Woodley shut his eyes and thought hard. Eventually he remembered that, normally, he could inhale above water and exhale below. He reversed the procedure, taking a deep breath of water and standing up, dribbling slowly.

He was near the steep, rocky bank of a lake, surrounded by high mountains. Not far away a stream rushed through a gorge to lose itself in the mere. Save for this canyon, the craggy walls were unbroken and seemed unscalable.

Woodley inadvertently breathed air, and had to dive for relief. A familiar voice pierced through his coughs.

"Oh, there you are," Bleys said. "What a time I had finding you. Why didn't you wake me up when you fell in the courtyard?"

Woodley regarded the Druid bitterly, but said nothing. Obviously his plan of escape had failed. He couldn't leave the lake. Not unless the wet magic spell was reversed.

Morgan could do that. Probably she wouldn't, though. Vivienne certainly wouldn't if she could. But Bleys was a magician. If he could be induced to reverse the enchantment—

"Well, come along," the Druid said. "I left my jug at the castle, and I'm thirsty. *Bip!*"

Woodley followed Bleys. His mind was working at top speed. It was necessary to return to Morgans stronghold, but—what then? The testing at the Shaking Rock? Woodley thought of the undine, and bit his lip. Not pleasant—no.

"Draedan can't get out of the yard, you know," Bleys presently remarked. "What possessed you to fall off the balcony anyway? It seems a stupid thing to do."

"I didn't fall," Woodley snapped. "I was pushed. Probably by Sir Bohart."

"Oh?" said Bleys, and puffed at his floating white beard. "Anyhow," he remarked at last, "you can't breathe out of water. It's dangerous to try."

Woodley said slowly, "When I met Vivienne, she was on dry land."

"Morgan taught her the trick," the Druid grunted. "It's beyond me—I never learned it. Any time you want to walk dry again, go see Vivienne." He grinned unpleasantly. "Or Morgan. It's my opinion that Vivienne is Morgan's daughter. That would explain a lot of things. However, here we are back at the castle, and we go in this way." He paused by a door in the outer wall, fumbled with the latch, and stepped across the threshold. "Come along!" he urged. "Don't let the fish in."

He headed along a corridor, Woodley at his heels. Soon they were back in Bleys' apartment,

and the Druid was selecting a new jug from his assortment. "Camelot Triple-X Brand," he murmured. "Ninety proof. It isn't, of course, but I label the bottles for old times' sake." He drank, and burst into a furious string of archaic oaths. "Damned self-deception, that's all it is. Ninety proof, hah! Magic never made good liquor, and there's no use arguing about it. *Bip!*" He glared malevolently.

Woodley was brooding. So Bleys didn't know the wet magic spell. Well, that left Vivienne and Morgan. How he could worm the secret out of either of those two, he had no idea. But he'd have to do it somehow, and soon. When would it be time for the testing? He asked Bleys.

"Now," said the Druid, getting up stiffly. "It's nearly sundown. Come along!" He peered at Woodley with bleary eyes. "Vivienne will have a sword for you. It's not Excalibur, but it will serve."

They went to a hall where Vivienne and Sir Bohart were waiting. The knight's jaw dropped at sight of Woodley, but he rallied valiantly. "You've come tardily, messire," he managed to say.

"Better tardy than not at all," Woodley returned, and had the satisfaction of seeing Bohart's eyes flicker. Vivienne moved forward, holding a great sword.

"My lord! With my own hands I shall arm you. And when you return from Shaking Rock, I shall be waiting." Her eyes promised much, and Sir Bohart gnawed his ruddy mustache.

Woodley touched his tunic where he had concealed the mandrake root. His lips twisted in a grim smile. He had an idea—

"Fair enough," he said. "I'm ready."

Vivienne clapped her hands. "Gramercy, a valiant knight! I shall summon Nurmala to guide you—"

"Don't bother," Woodley interrupted. "I'd rather have Sir Bohart show me the way."

The knight made a gobbling sound. "I am no lackey!"

"Fie," Vivienne reproved. "'Tis a simple request to make."

"Oh, well," Woodley shrugged. "If Sir Bohart's afraid, never mind. I can understand how he feels. Even with that magic cuirass, accidents might happen. No, you stay here by the fire, Bohart. You'll feel safer."

Bohart turned purple. There was, of course, only one answer he could possibly make. So, ten minutes later, Woodley walked beside the red-mustached knight through the ooze of the lake bottom toward a towering pinnacle of stone in the green distance.

Sir Bohart preserved a furious silence. Once he rattled his sword in its scabbard, but Woodley

thoughtfully didn't hear. Instead, he remarked, "I wonder what it is behind the Shaking Rock. Got any ideas?"

"Morgan does not tell me her secrets."

"Uh-huh. Still, it must be pretty dangerous. Eh?"

Bohart smiled toothily at that. "I hope so."

Woodley shrugged. "Maybe I'd better use some magic. A sword might not do the trick."

The knight turned his head to stare. "Goety?"

"Sure. I'm a magician. Didn't you know?"

"Vivienne said . . . but I did not think—" There was more respect in Bohart's eyes now, and a touch of fear. Woodley chuckled with a lightheartedness he scarcely felt.

"I know a few tricks. How to make myself invisible, for instance."

"With fern seed? I have heard of that."

"I use mandrake juice," Woodley explained. "Come to think of it, that gag would come in handy now. In view of what may be behind the Shaking Rock—yeah." He moved his hands in intricate gestures. "Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, Mauch Chunk, Philadelphia, Kalamazoo," he added, and deftly slipped the mandrake from his tunic. To the staring Bohart, it seemed as though the gnarled little root had been snatched out of thin water.

"By Atys!" the knight said, impressed. "Swounds!"

Woodley lifted the mandrake toward his head, and then hesitated. "Wait a minute. Maybe I'd better make you—"

"Make me invisible also?" Bohart jumped at the bait, after one apprehensive glance ahead at the Shaking Rock. "Yes—that would be wise."

"O. K. Let's have your helmet. Uh . . . maybe you could help me out against this . . . monster

. . . if I need help. Though I don't think I will."

Bohart's red mustache did not entirely conceal his sardonic smile. "Well, we shall see. My sword is sharp."

But Woodley's apparent attempt to propitiate him had disarmed the knight's suspicions. He handed over his helmet and watched as Woodley inverted it and used the haft of his dagger to mash the mandrake root into pulp, mortar and pestle fashion.

"There. That's all. Put the helmet back on—keep the mandrake in it—and you'll be invisible."

Sir Bohart obeyed. He looked down at himself.

"It doesn't work."

Woodley stared around blankly. "Where are you? I . . . Sir Bohart!"

The knight was taken aback. "I . . . I'm here. But I can see myself as clearly as ever."

"Of course," Woodley explained, not looking at the other, "you can see yourself, but nobody else can. That's the way the mandrake spell works."

"Oh Well. Make yourself invisible now."

"Too much bother," Woodley said casually. "I don't want all the odds on my side. It takes the fun out of a fight. If I get into trouble, I'll use magic, but I think my sword will be enough. Here we are at the Shaking Rock."

Far above them, a boulder balanced on the stone pinnacle rocked slowly in the lake currents. Woodley noticed a small cave a few yards away. He stopped.

So did Sir Bohart, who was visibly nervous. "I go no farther."

"O. K.," Woodley nodded, his throat dry. "Just wait here, then. I'll be back in a minute. Uh . . .



you wouldn't care to lend me that cuirass of yours, would you?"

"No."

"I thought you wouldn't. Well . . . *adios.*" Woodley lingered a moment longer, eyeing the cave mouth; but there was no way to turn back now. Anyhow, his trick should work. Nurmala had said that undines were strongly attracted by mandrake juice—

He left Sir Bohart leaning on his sword, and plunged ahead into the shadows that lurked behind the Shaking Rock. He felt the ground slant down steeply, and moved with more caution. There was, after all, little to see. It was too dark.

Something moved in the green gloom. A huge ball of hair that drifted past, paused, and then came with unerring accuracy toward Woodley. It was the undine.

Fifteen feet long, shaped like a fat submarine, it was surrounded by a haziness where the filaments grew finer and vanished. It had no definite edges. It simply faded into the green darkness.

It swam by wriggling its filaments, like a ciliate. Woodley miscalculated its speed, and before he could turn, the undine was shockingly close. A tendril whipped across his cheek, burning like a bare wire overcharged with electric current.

Automatically Woodley whipped out his sword, but sanity held him back from using it. Steel would be no good against this creature. Besides, he had a safer plan. If it wasn't too late—

He turned and ran at top speed around the base of the Shaking Rock. Sir Bohart was still standing there, but at sight of Woodley he, too, whirled and made off, forgetting that he was presumably invisible. But the undine was a sight fearful enough to drive any man to flight.

The mouth of the little cave gaped like a friendly mouth. Woodley went into it headfirst, losing his sword and rolling over several times before he came to a halt. Hastily he twisted about and looked at what was happening. Would the undine follow him? Or would it catch the scent of the mandrake juice—the effluvium hanging in the water where Sir Bohart had stood?

The cloud of wriggling filaments was following the trail. The undine torpedoed in pursuit of the knight—

Woodley sighed deeply. He found his sword, went cautiously toward the mouth of the cave, and watched. Now the undine had caught up with Sir Bohart. Those dangerous filaments couldn't harm the man, of course, protected as he was by his magic cuirass. But it must be definitely uncomfortable to be surrounded and smothered by an undine—

A sword flashed. Sir Bohart was fighting at last. Woodley grinned.

He hoped the undine wouldn't last long. He

was getting hungry. But, of course, he'd have to wait till . . . er . . . till he had passed the testing Morgan le Fay had set him.

He was presently roused from his reverie by Bohart's yells. "You tricked me! You lickspittle knave! I'll split you from pate to groin! You made me a cat's-paw—"

"Hold on!" Woodley said, nimbly dodging. He still held his bare sword, and automatically countered Bohart's blow. The undine, he noticed, was quite dead about twenty feet down the slope. Small fishes were already approaching it.

"You craven cur!"

"Wait! What'll Vivienne say if I'm found dead with my head lopped off by a sword? What'll Morgan say?"

That sobered Sir Bohart. He paused, his brand held motionless in midair, the red mustache wriggling with fury. His face was beet-purple.

But he didn't renew the attack. Woodley lowered his own weapon and talked fast.

"Don't forget I was there when Vivienne said she'd sick Morgan on you. I still remember how scared you looked. Vivienne wants me alive, and if she found out you killed me—and she'd certainly find it out—"

"You warlock," Sir Bohart snarled. "You warlock devil!" But there was a betraying mottled pallor in his no longer purple cheeks.

Woodley put his sword away. "What are you kicking about? You didn't get hurt, did you? You've got that magic cuirass. Look at me!" He ran his forefinger over the livid welt that ran from temple to jaw. "The undine put its mark on me, all right. You weren't even scratched."

"You made me your cat's-paw," Bohart said sulkily.

Woodley persuasively slipped his hand through the other's crooked arm. "Forget that. We can be plenty useful to each other, if you'll play along. If you won't—I've got lots of influence with Vivienne. Want me to use it?"

"You devil," the knight growled, but he was licked and knew it. "I'll let you live. I'll have to. Provided you shield me against Morgan." He brightened. "Yes. Tell Vivienne that I am your friend. Then—"

Woodley grinned. "Suppose I told her you pushed me into Draedan's courtyard this afternoon."

"But—messire!" Bohart gripped the other man's shoulders. "Nay! I did not! You cannot prove it was I—"

"It was, though, wasn't it? And Vivienne would take my word against yours. But cool off. I won't tell. If you'll remember something."

Bohart licked his lips. "What?"

"That I killed the undine."

"Oh, a thrice thousand curses! But I suppose I must. If I do this, you will use your influence

with Vivienne, though. She is capricious, and Morgan has often asked her to . . . to—"The knight swallowed and began again. "Morgan wishes to destroy me. So far, Vivienne has not permitted that. Now you and I can strike a bargain. You get the credit for this testing, and in return you insist that I remain free from Morgan—should that danger arise."

"Fair enough."

"But if Morgan should learn of this deceit we have practiced upon her, we will both die—quite terribly. She is unforgiving."

"She won't find out."

"If she should, not even Vivienne could save us."

Woodley frowned slightly. The risk wasn't alluring. Yet it would have to be taken. Besides, Morgan would never find out—

"It is a bargain," Sir Bohart said. "But remember this: if you should ever seek to betray me, it will mean your own downfall. Your life and mine are one now. If I go down, I drag you with me—because then I shall speak. And Vivienne will weep for you, if not for me."

Woodley shivered. With an effort he threw off his intangible fears. "Forget it," he said. "Dinner's waiting. And we've got to tow the undine back to the castle."

That wasn't difficult, since the dead monster floated easily. Plodding along the lake bottom, Woodley felt his spirits rise. Once he touched the hilt of his sword. Wielding a weapon like that was oddly satisfying. Suppose he had not tricked Bohart into aiding him? Suppose he had battled the undine with bare steel alone? Briefly Woodley half regretted that he had not attempted the dangerous deed.

It would have been dangerous, though. Far too much so. And there had been no real need to risk his skin, as he had proved. Calm logic was better. Eventually that would get him out of the castle, and back to dry land, free from Morgan's perilous enchantments.

He had passed the testing. So he was safe for a while. The next step was to learn the wet magic spell that would make it possible for him to breathe air again.

Woodley tugged at the bunch of undine filaments in his fist. Behind him, the lake monster floated slowly in his wake, a comet tail of small fishes veering after it. The castle loomed ahead—

"Remember!" Sir Bohart warned. "Our lives are one now. Here is Bleys. No more talk—it is not safe in the castle."

The lake bottom was shrouded in night shadows. It must be past sunset in the world above. Sir Bohart slipped away and was gone. The brown-robed figure of Bleys was visible ahead, by a door in a tower's foot.

"Here's the prize," Woodley called. "Come and get it!"

The Druid plowed forward through the ooze. His eyes gleamed through the waving net of white beard.

"An undine. And you have slain it—"

Woodley felt an extraordinary sense of shame as he met the wizard's gaze. But that was ridiculous! Why the devil should he feel embarrassed because he had hesitated to commit suicide? Hell!

Bleys said slowly, "I told you that courage was both sword and shield. Magic cannot stand against it. Now I—" He paused, his hand going out in a queer fumbling gesture. "Age is heavy upon me. When I saw you bringing your booty toward the castle just now, it seemed to me I was standing beneath the wall of Camelot, watching Arthur Pendragon—"

The low voice tailed off into silence. Bleys said, "He was and will be."

Nurmala's murmur broke the spell that held Woodley silent. The naid rippled through the door in the tower, carrying a lighted lamp.

"Oh! Messire Arthur of Woodley has slain the monster! My lord!" She curtsied low. "There will be feasting tonight. The table is laid."

Bleys seemed to relapse into his usual drunken self. "All right," he snapped, and the girl turned and went back into the tower. Woodley noticed that the lamp flame shone through the translucent emerald of her body. It looked rather pretty, or would have, had it not been so disturbing.

"Worse than pyromaniacs, those naiads," Bleys remarked, producing a jug and drinking from it. "Can't leave fire alone. Silly to carry a lamp in the castle at night—the place is lighted by magic. Blood and fire, that's all a naid thinks of. Horrid wet oozy things," he finished, in an outburst of Senile fury. I hate 'em all. I hate everybody. Come along! Leave your undine here; it'll be safe."

Woodley noticed the sharp glance the Druid cast at him, though, and wondered if Bleys was as drunk as he seemed. Apparently so, for his progress along the passage was punctuated by oaths, groans, and bips. He led the way to Woodley's apartment, where the latter made a hasty and inadequate toilet—for one couldn't wash, under the lake—and then hobbled off to the great hall of the castle. Woodley had not seen this room before.

It was very large indeed, and had a gallery half-way up one wall. There were tapestries, dozens of them, rushes on the floor—presumably weighted, since they didn't float up—and a dais at the farther end. There, seated by a fairly small table, was Vivienne. She looked strikingly lovely, in a gown of applegreen satin embroidered with pearls. Her hair was in braids, plaited with pearls, and she

wore a jeweled belt. She, at least, was the essence of magic.

"My lord!" She ran to Woodley. "They told me you were safe. But your poor cheek . . . oh! That horrible undine."

"It's nothing. Doesn't hurt."

"Nothing! To slay an undine . . . yet I knew you would prove yourself a great knight. Come, sit by me here, my love, and we can talk as we sup." Her gaze devoured Woodley, who felt slightly ill at ease.

Grumpily Bleys found a bench for himself and greedily eyed the linen-draped table. "I don't want fish again," he snapped. "Sick of it."

"It's roast pig," Vivienne said, in a glancing aside. "Sea pig. Fowl and pasties . . . ah, my lord! Now that you have passed Morgan's testing, you and I will dwell here forever."

Before Woodley could answer, there was an outburst of music. Slow in tempo, it came from the gallery across the hall, but there was no sign of any musicians. Vivienne followed Woodley's gaze.

"That? Morgan keeps the musicians invisible. They're elementals, and ugly enough to spoil your appetite. The queen will join us later. She does not eat."

A drapery at the back of the dais was pulled aside, and several naiads appeared, each of them, as far as Woodley could make out, exact duplicates of Nurmala. They carried trenchers and trays, serving in complete silence. The food, for the most part, was familiar to Woodley, but some of it tasted strange. The stewed fruit had a definitely uncanny flavor. Nor did he especially like the omnipresent almond-milk flavoring.

Yet he ate heartily, for he was ravenous. And he would need all his energy to carry out his plan—securing the wet magic spell from Vivienne or, perhaps, Morgan. How—

Bleys drank steadily, and Vivienne picked at her food and languished at her self-chosen lover. She insisted that he learn the proper etiquette of Arthurian times.

"We eat from the same trencher, Messire," she said, with a demure twinkle. "You must cut the choicest portions and offer them to me on the point of your knife. I . . . oh, dear. Here is Sir Bohart."

It was indeed the knight, advancing through the rushes. His eyes, fixed on Woodley's, held a warning message.

"Forgive me for my tardiness, my lady," Bohart said. "I did not think Messire Arthur would return so soon from slaying the monster."

With a certain air of coldness, Vivienne welcomed the knight, and soon Sir Bohart was gnawing on a mutton bone and casting furtive glances

at Woodley. The supper went on in silence, broken only by the playing of the unseen musicians. At last it was over, with nuts, highly spiced fruit, and wine which Woodley found mild and tasteless. Still, after those spices, vitriol would have seemed like milk, he mused, nursing his tongue. He felt rather like Draedan.

The naiads whisked away the cloth, leaving a smooth-topped table inset with a chessboard. Replete, Woodley settled back. He had earned a rest. Presently he could begin to work on the next problem—the necessary spell that Vivienne held—but not yet. Better to play along with the girl, get in her good graces, as she laid her burnished head on his shoulder.

"Oh, I was telling you about Uther," she said. "And that widow. Ten children, as I said. What a rogue Uther was, to be sure. It seems—"

And she was off, in a cloud of scandal. Bleys drank. Sir Bohart moved uneasily, as though nervous and worried. Woodley dozed. Vivienne unfolded the secrets of the hoary past, and the band played on.

Woodley became aware that Vivienne had stopped talking. He shivered, and, with a sudden sense of abysmal shock, sat bolt upright. Briefly he felt an extraordinary vertigo, and a ghastly sensation as though the flesh was crawling upon his bones.

Then he saw a woman seating herself across the table.

She wore a very plain white gown, with long, trailing sleeves, and there was a band of jeweled flowers about her slim waist. Star flowers glinted in her hair, where hints of bronze showed amid the cloudy darkness. Her face was young and very lovely. Woodley found it difficult to see her face, except in sidewise glances. Why?

He—well, he could not meet her eyes.

He could not look into them. He found it utterly impossible to meet her gaze. Why this was, Woodley could not in the least imagine. He forced himself to turn his head so that he could look into the eyes of Morgan le Fay.

And his own eyes would not obey. On the very edge of obedience, they rebelled. It was as though Woodley's flesh revolted against the commands his brain issued.

Yet he could see her face, though not directly, and it seemed oddly familiar. Where had he seen it before?

Of course! That tapestry with the tree and the serpent. Morgan had the face of Lilith—

Woodley stood up, rather awkwardly, and bowed. "Your majesty—"

"No," Morgan said, her voice gentle and abstracted. "You need not rise. I am Morgan—call me that. As I shall call you Arthur." The name

lingered on her tongue, as though she were loath to relinquish it.

Woodley sat down. There was a silence. He tried again to meet Morgan's eyes and failed.

She said, "You slew the undine? Because if you have not passed my testing fairly, nothing can save you. Especially since you are named Arthur. I mislike that name—"

Woodley met Sir Bohart's imploring gaze and swallowed, his throat dry. "I killed the undine. Fairly, of course."

"Very well," said the Queen of Air and Darkness. "Let it be forgotten, then. It has been a long time since I saw anyone from above the lake. Sir Galahodin was the last, I believe."

Bohart coughed nervously. Morgan smiled at him. Her slim fingers tapped the table top.

"He played at chess with me," she added, half maliciously. "You see . . . Arthur . . . for a hundred years or so after I came here, I invited occasional guests. I would play at chess with them. Then I tired of it, and only lately have I felt the . . . need again. It does not matter much; I would not leave the lake for such a slight whim. But Sir Bohart is here, and . . . Vivienne, have you not tired of him yet?"

"I tired of him long ago," the girl said frankly. "But I am used to Sir Bohart and his ways."

"You have a new lover," Morgan murmured. "Will you not withdraw your protection from the old one?"

Sir Bohart squirmed. Arthur said hastily, "Vivienne, I hope . . . I mean, Bohart's promised to show me a lot of things, how to joust and so on. You wouldn't—"

Morgan's slow, sweet voice said to Vivienne, "In time you will tire of this new lover, too, and you will not weep to see him play at chess with me."

Woodley gulped.

"I shall always love Messire Arthur," Vivienne contended stoutly. "When I first saw him, he reminded me of Merlin. Also, since Sir Bohart's company pleases my lord—"

Morgan laughed a little. "Merlin! Ay me! Well, I will not touch Sir Bohart without your permission, but—" She shrugged. "It is in my mind that I would prefer Arthur, indeed. Perhaps the name evokes old memories."

"Er—" said Woodley.

Morgan watched him. "You are safe enough for now. As long as Vivienne is here—and she has no wish to leave the lake—she may have her playthings. But she is human, and a woman—therefore capricious. Sometime she will grow tired of you, Arthur, and then you will play at chess with me."

"I . . . I'm not very good at it," Woodley said, and paused, startled by the shrill cackle of laughter

that came from Bleys. The Druid subsided immediately to gulp wine.

"Who plays—chess—with Morgan—win or lose, he loses," Bleys said.

Woodley was unaccountably reminded of the Eden tapestry he had seen. Well, he'd have to pry the wet-magic spell out of Vivienne. Morgan was out of the question. She was too—disturbing.

Vivienne said, "As long as I am here, Messire Arthur will not play at chess."

Morgan smiled again. "All things end," she remarked cryptically. "Let us talk of other matters. Has the world forgotten me, Arthur?"

"Oh, no. You're in Tennyson, Malory—you were even in the movies once."

"Movies?"

Woodley explained. Morgan shook her head.

"Faith! And no doubt they think I am a legend."

Vivienne said, "What were you telling me about history and fable, Morgan? I meant to explain it to Messire Arthur, but I could not understand. He did not know how legend could be true—nor do I, for that matter."

"Tell the story, Bleys," the queen commanded.

The Druid drank wine. "Oh, it's simple enough. Something to do with the fluidity of time. Historically, Pendragon was named Artorius, a petty British chieftain who fought against the Romans, around 500. There weren't any castles or knights then—not like this. We're pure Plantagenet."

Woodley looked puzzled, as he felt. "But I thought—"

"Legends can effect the past. Ever write a story, Messire Arthur?"

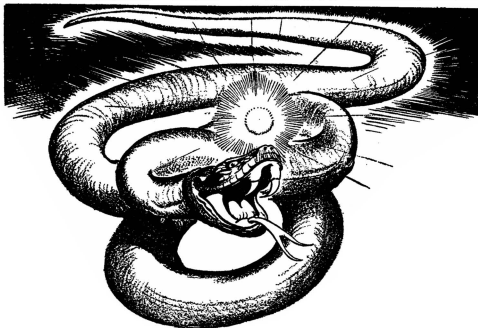
"Well—I've tried a scenario or two."

"Then you've doubtless gone back to make insertions and revisions. Suppose you're writing a history of the world. You deal with Artorius and his time historically, go on for a few thousand words, and then get a better idea. You decide to make Artorius a great king, and to build up a heroic saga about knighthood and the round table—about Bleys and Guenevere and Merlin and so forth. You just go back and make the insertion. Later on, you have one of your other characters, named Malory, make a number of references to the Arthurian cycle. Law of compensation and revision," Bleys said ambiguously.

"But we're not talking about stories," Woodley contended. "We're talking about real events. Life isn't just a story somebody's writing."

"That's what you think," the Druid retorted rudely. "And a lot you know about it. *Bip!*"

There was a silence, broken when Vivienne began to retail some long-forgotten scandal about Yseult and a Dolorous Knight. As usual Woodley went to sleep. His last memory was the sight of Morgan's half-glimpsed face, lovely, mysterious, and terrible.



He awoke in bed, to find Nurmala peering in through the curtains. "We breakfast early, my lord," the naiad bubbled. "Will it please you to rise?"

"Is it morning?"

"Sunlight shines through the lake."

"Oh," said Woodley, and followed his routine of struggling into his drawers under the sheets. This seemed to baffle Nurmala, who presently quivered out of the room. Sight of her green jello back made Woodley realize that he was hungry.

In the great hall he found only Vivienne. He had a slight headache, and, after responding to the girl's request for a kiss, fell to upon ale, rolls, and salt fish. He would have preferred tomato juice. There was no invisible orchestra in the gallery this morning.

"Cozy place," he remarked, shivering a little. "I've never had breakfast in Grand Central Station before."

She caught his meaning. "All the castles had a great hall. After this we can eat in the solar, if you like. In the old days there were mighty feasts. Boards were laid on trestles to make tables—sometimes we have banquets even now." "Visitors—down here?" Woodley asked, puzzled.

"Morgan raises the dead," Vivienne explained. "It amuses her, at times."

"Well, it doesn't amuse me," said the horrified man. "Where is Morgan this morning?"

"She is—busy. Bleys? Trying to get drunk, I suppose. Senile creature that he is."

"Well, where's Sir Bohart?" Woodley wanted to know.

There was a strange look in Vivienne's eyes. "After you fell asleep last night, and after Bohart

had gone to his apartment, Bleys told me how that craven knight hurled you into the dragon's courtyard. So I withdrew my protection from him. Now he plays at chess with Morgan."

Woodley choked on ale. "Oh, my g-guh . . . Vivienne, where is he?"

"He plays at chess with Morgan. You will not see him again."

Woodley put down the drinking horn. His stomach was churning coldly. So the worst had happened. Bleys had remembered, and had talked. Now—

"Vivienne! I thought you intended to keep Bohart alive. You've got to save him!"

"After he tried to murder you? Nay! Besides, it is too late. The . . . game . . . will not finish till sundown, but Sir Bohart is already beyond rescue."

The girl's dark brows drew together. "That reminds me. Morgan wants to see you."

"She . . . she does?"

"Tonight, she said. I do not know why. Something Sir Bohart told her, she said. It does not matter."

"Oh, doesn't it," Woodley muttered, and finished the ale. It didn't help much. He could visualize the future all too well. Bohart, facing destruction, had revealed to Morgan the trick about the undine. And what had Morgan said last night?

"If you have not passed my testing fairly, nothing can save you."

Tonight would be zero hour, then. Woodley had until sundown—perhaps a little more time than that, but certainly not much more.

One day, in which to learn the wet magic spell from Vivienne!

Abruptly Woodley determined on a bold move.

An attack was the best defense.

"Vivienne," he said. "I want to go back."

She did not move. "You will stay with me always."

"Suppose Morgan—does something to me?"

"She will not. And—" Vivienne's eyes darkened. "And I would rather have it thus than let you go back above the lake, where other women would have you. Mark you, Arthur; you cannot breathe above water now. Only Morgan or I can change that. In air you die. We will not help you to leave the lake. And if you try—I shall bring you back, messire. Listen!" She leaned toward him, elbows on the chessboard table. "You are invisible and intangible to humans. You are one of us. Your voice could not be heard by any but the magic folk."

"You could change me back, Vivienne!"

"And let another woman have you? I would sooner see you a corpse. Do not speak of this again, messire, lest I change my mood and tell Morgan she may have you for a chess partner!"

"Don't bother," Woodley said through tight lips. "Morgan can take care of herself."

But he realized he had gone too far, and taken the wrong tack with Vivienne. So he placated her—and she was responsively willing. At last, head on his shoulder, she began to talk about Sir Pellinore and the Questing Beast. "Glatissant, its name was," she explained, all velvet now. "Old Pellinore got tired of his wife and said he had to go questing. Honor demanded it. So off he went, cavorting through Britain. Nobody ever saw the Beast but Pellinore—and many's the wench who listened to Pellinore's stories about Glatissant, to her sorrow. Forsooth! You could mark Pellinore's trail nine months after he passed. I always say—"

Woodley wasn't listening. He was thinking, hard and fast. He knew now, quite definitely, that he had to get out of the lake before sundown. Morgan . . . she was not, he thought, of human blood at all. And that—chess game!

What nightmare that euphemism masked he could not guess. But he knew very well he didn't want to play chess with the Queen of Air and Darkness, as poor Bohart was doing now. Again Woodley remembered the Eden tapestry—

How could he escape?

He was invisible and intangible—and dumb—to humans. No one could see, hear or sense him. Except the magic folk, whoever they were. Moreover, once Woodley got out of the lake, he would strangle.

Wait! There was a thought somewhere along that line. Men could live under water, in diving suits. Presumably Woodley could live in air, if he could arrange to breathe water continuously.

A diving suit was obviously out of the question.

But—good lord!—all Woodley needed was a bowl of water to carry with him! He almost grinned at the thought, but masked his face in time.

In this rocky country there were few streams—only one emptying into the lake. But . . . let's see . . . Woodley didn't want to be a water-breather all his life; it would be horribly inconvenient.

And Vivienne would pursue him. She could fly—

Woodley strained his memory. Wasn't there something in the Arthurian legend that would help him? He had a vague glimmer of an idea . . . Merlin.

In his dotage, Merlin fell in love with Vivienne and followed her all through Britain. Finally the girl, tired of her ancient lover, learned a spell from him and used it to shut Merlin up inside the trunk of an oak. If Merlin were only around!

"Good lord!" said Woodley, sitting up. "Uh . . . oh, nothing, darling. Something bit me."

"Poor dear," said Vivienne, snuggling closer. "After killing that undine yesterday . . . well, as I was saying, this knight climbed down from the tower and hid in the moat till—"

Woodley was remembering his experience just before he had met Vivienne—that little cave of roots under an oak tree, where something had kicked him in the pants. Soon after that, Vivienne had said that he "smelled of Merlin."

Merlin—of course!—was in that oak!

And no doubt feeling embittered toward Vivienne. Woodley's memory of Malory told him that Merlin and Morgan le Fay had always been bitter enemies. Usually Merlin had triumphed.

Merlin would help him now, out of sheer gratitude, if he could free the wizard. Certainly Merlin could reverse the wet magic, make Woodley an air-breather again, and protect him against Morgan and Vivienne. Shut up in that oak for centuries—ha!

It was beautifully logical. And all Woodley had to do, therefore, was to learn the spell that would free Merlin.

Bleys was the answer to that.

"Darling," said Woodley suddenly, "what happened to the clothes I was wearing when you brought me to the lake?"

"Why?" Suspicion showed in the dark eyes.

"I want a cigarette." He explained about tobacco. The girl nodded.

"Of course. Morgan can make some, by magic, but it will take time till she finds the right spell. I'll have your things brought here. Nurmala!"

The naiad came translucently from behind the curtain, listened, and went away, to return with Woodley's clothing. He searched for and found the cigarettes, which were magically dry. Of course, it was quite impossible to smoke under water, but . . . Woodley blew a smoke ring.

He glanced keenly at Vivienne. "Try it, darling?"

Under his tutelage, the girl learned about tobacco. Ten minutes later, her face a rather becoming shade of mauve, she interrupted an involved story about Guenevere and Borre to leave the room. She did not return.

Tense with nervous excitement, Woodley found the flask of brandy still in the pocket of his uniform. It was more than half full. Good!

He went to Bleys' apartment. On the way, he picked up a glazed crockery bowl, which he thoughtfully left just outside the Druid's door.

"May I come in?"

"Bip!"

Woodley took this for assent. He found Bleys fuming over a retort and sampling the contents of a jug.

"Dish water!" Bleys shrielled. "Hog slop! Pap for suckling babes! After working hours over the spell, I felt sure it would be at least thirty proof. May Satan crumble my bones! No—" he added hastily, glancing around, "I take it back."

"Try this," Woodley offered, holding out the flask. "I'd forgotten I had it with me."

Bleys' eyes glistened through his floating beard as his clawlike hand shot out. "Dry-land liquor? Messire Arthur, I love you for this! Wine? Ale?"

"Brandy. Try it."

Bleys took one swallow. Then he lowered the flask, his lips twitching convulsively, his head thrown back. A low purring came from deep in his throat.

"Brandy." His voice caressed the word. His eyes opened, a greedy, mad gleam in them. "I shall get drunk! For the first time in centuries!"

"No," said Woodley, who had recaptured the flask. "Sorry. That's all you get."

"B-but—" Bleys' jaw dropped. "Messire Woodley! You jest!"

"Like hell I do," Woodley said grimly.

"Wait," said the Druid, slobbering. "I'll make you wine. Mead. Ale. Tons of it. I'll give you anything."

Woodley waited. Finally he decided he had Bleys where he wanted him. "O. K.," he said then, "you can have the rest of the brandy. But you've got to pay me for it. I want a certain—spell."

Bleys looked shrewd. "The spell to change a water-dweller to an air-breather? All right."

"No, you don't," Woodley snapped, drawing the flask out of reach. "You told me once that you didn't know it. No tricks, now."

"Well," the Druid said sulkily, "what do you want, then?"

"Does Mer . . . did Merlin know the wet-magic spell?"

"Yes, he did. Merlin was my pupil once, you

know, but he learned far more than I ever did. 'Why?'"

Woodley sighed with relief. "Never mind. Do you know the spell to release a man shut up in an oak tree?"

For a long time Bleys said nothing. Then he whirled to a nearby table, picked up a jug, and drank from it. With a furious oath he sent the ewer smashing against the floor.

"Slop!" he shrielled. "I cannot drink this stuff forever! The oak tree enchantment? Oak is a Druid tree. Of course I know it."

"Then tell it to me," Woodley said. "For the brandy."

Greed triumphed. At last Bleys explained the formula.

"That's the right one?"

"It is. Bip! Give me the brandy!"

"Swear it by . . . uh . . . Mider."

"By Mider I swear it," Bleys said angrily.

"You are a fool, Messire Arthur. But do as you will. If Morgan slays me, at least I will die drunk."

He drank brandy. Woodley turned away.

The Druid's voice halted him. "Wait. I have a thought."

Bleys was shaking his head, his beard streaming, as he blinked through watery eyes. "This—brandy—clears my brain. Strange. I have been half-drunk for too long . . . a minute." He drank again.

Woodley hesitated, remembering Morgan. But the Druid's skinny hand clutched his arm. Bleys peered up, searching the other's face with his bleary stare.

"Arthur . . . I should have thought of this before. When I saw you bringing back the undine yesterday . . . Bah, to be in one's dotage—I grow old and stupid. Yet I remember now."

He tightened his grip. "You must listen. It is important. Perhaps because Morgan dislikes you, perhaps because your name is Arthur—listen! Do you remember that I told you the course of history can be changed? That time is fluid?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Strong characters twist an author's pen and change the story he writes. Artorius of Britain did that. He was a petty chieftain, but he was strong—valorous. So strong that he forced himself into a greater role than he had originally. There was a—revision. This petty chieftain took Excalibur and made a legend. As Arthur Pendragon he saved England from the powers of the dark."

Woodley glanced at the door, anxious to be gone. "Well?"

"On Arthur's tomb are the words—he was and will be. There is a legend that Arthur will come again, in the hour of England's need, to save her

once more. Has that hour come?"

"Then—" Woodley stopped, licking his lips. He stared at Bleys.

"Listen again!" The talon fingers tightened. "Any man can be Arthur, if he is strong enough to twist the author's pen. Any man can be Arthur, if he dares to hold Excalibur. And your name—" "Your life may not have been a great one, till now. That does not matter. Artorius was not great, till he held Excalibur. Do you know why I am here, why Morgan has kept me her prisoner?"

"Why?"

"I am Excalibur's guardian," Bleys said. "After Merlin passed, the charge was given to me. Arthur slept in Avalon. Yet the prophecy said that in England's hour of need, he would come again, and I must offer Excalibur to him. I looked to see Pendragon," the Druid went on quietly. "I had forgotten that Pendragon was once merely Artorius. Now I think the time has come. It was not chance that brought you beneath the lake. Excalibur lies here, ready for your hand. With it you can be Arthur."

Woodley's eyes were shining. "Bleys—" He panted, biting his lip. "Morgan."

"With Excalibur you can conquer her—and more. The man who holds Cut-Steel will save England!"

"Why haven't you used it on Morgan?" Woodley asked quickly.

"I am its guardian—the only man in all earth who can never hold that brand." There was a strange, deep sorrow in Bleys' voice. It was incongruous that he should seem a figure of such dignity, in his dingy brown robe—

"I know what is in your mind," the Druid said.

"Escape and safety. It is not the right way. Excalibur lies ready for your hand. I have seen the portents, and I think the time has come. Remember—any man can be Arthur. If he has the courage to take and wield Excalibur. Artorius had that courage. Gawaine, the son of Morgause, did not; Cut-Steel was offered him first, and he was afraid. And now—"

"I—can be Arthur," Woodley said, very softly.

"You can change past, present, and future. A strong and brave man can alter history. Your own past does not matter. If you take Excalibur now, there will be—revisions."

Woodley did not answer. He was remembering the way a sword hilt had felt against his palm, and the strange, high excitement that had filled him when he matched steel briefly against Bohart. To hold Excalibur—

To be Arthur!

"You can be the man," Bleys said. "You slew the undine. I should have known then that you were the man for whom I had waited."

But Woodley had not slain the undine. A small

cold sickness crawled suddenly in his stomach. He said, "If I took . . . Excalibur . . . what would I have to do?"

Bleys' scrawny body trembled with excitement. "You would know. First, slay Morgan. After that your star would lead you."

Slay Morgan?

Somehow a sword, even Excalibur, seemed a poor weapon against the horror of her eyes. Even now the enchantress might be finishing Bohart and preparing for the next victim.

Suppose Woodley took Excalibur and failed to conquer Morgan? Suppose he couldn't wield the magic sword? After all, he hadn't really killed the undine. He had depended on strategy, which was perhaps more dependable than courage alone.

If Woodley had had no alternative, he would have battled Morgan, and done his best. He thought so, anyhow. But the alternative was so much safer!

Besides—he wasn't Arthur!

Not that he was a coward—no. But Bleys' proposition was a gamble, pure and simple. And why should Woodley gamble with his own future at stake? Merlin was in the oak, and Merlin, with all his mighty powers, was certainly a match for Morgan le Fay. This way was logical, much safer, and with the odds in his favor.

And yet—certainly there was something very splendid about the alternative Bleys was offering. Excalibur! To hold such a weapon! Briefly his mind flamed with the idea. Armed with that enchanted sword, he would have little need to fear even the Queen of Air and Darkness.

Provided—and that was the hitch!—provided he could hold Cut-Steel. What if he wasn't the man? Certainly he didn't feel very much like Arthur Pendragon. In the wrong hands Excalibur would be worse than useless—probably it couldn't even be wielded. Woodley's scalp crawled at the thought of himself facing Morgan's terrible gaze armed with a useless sword—

No, it was too much of a gamble. Accepting this glittering offer *might* mean finding himself completely defenseless against Morgan, with all chance of escape gone. The dice were too heavily loaded. Merlin meant certain safety.

The Druid bent forward, eager-eyed. "Excalibur is hidden in a place where only Arthur would dare enter. Let me show you that place."

Woodley took a deep breath.

"Bleys," he said, his voice not quite steady. "I think I've got a better idea. I'm going to try it, anyhow. If it doesn't work, I'll be back to fight Morgan."

The Druid's figure seemed to shrink in upon itself. Bleys let fall his hand from Woodley's arm and stepped back.

"Gawaine," he said. "Excalibur is not offered twice."

"But—I'll fight Morgan, if I have to. Only—"

There was no answer, only stony silence. Woodley hesitated, feeling, curiously, as though he had failed some vital test. He turned at last to the door, leaving Bleys sitting on the floor, pouring brandy down his throat.

For a moment there had been a curious, somber dignity to the old man; the brandy had paradoxically made him soberer than Woodley had ever seen him. All that was gone now. Except for a little discouraged sag to the shoulders, he looked as he had always looked, dingy and drunk.

"Good-bye, fool," he said. "*Bip!*"

Woodley nodded and let the curtain fall back, picking up the crockery bowl he had left outside the door. Then he went in search of the portal by which Bleys and he had entered the castle yesterday. He was thinking uncomfortably of Bleys' proposal—and almost regretting his decision.

But it was much more important to be watching for possible guards. Suppose he encountered Vivienne? Or even Morgan? But not even a naiad appeared. Ten minutes later Woodley was climbing the lake bottom.

Fish swam past. He plodded on. And at last his head broke water.

Well—he had made his decision. He hoped it had not been the wrong one. There was only one way to find out—

He filled the crockery bowl, and, when he had to breathe again, he did so after dipping his face into the water. It worked.

He repeated the process half a dozen times before he felt satisfied. Then he made for the shore. The stream burst out of its gorge a few hundred feet to the left. Woodley reached it and discovered that the canyon, though steep, was by no means unscalable.

He looked back. Behind him, the still surface of the lake shone like silver under the midday sun. Was that—his heart jumped—was that something leaping up from the depths?

Only a fish, thank Heaven. But the sight reminded Woodley of the urgent need for speed. He inadvertently breathed air, and spluttered and coughed for a time with his face in the water. Then he turned to the gorge.

He climbed fast. Nor had he far to go—half a mile or less, till he recognized the spot where he had first met Vivienne. The oak must be a few hundred yards beyond.

Some instinct made him look up. High above, toward the lake, a bird was wheeling in midair. No—not a bird—Vivienne!

"Lord!" Woodley breathed, and dived under a projecting rock. He lay hidden for a time. When he dared to peer out again, Vivienne had vanished. Luckily she had not yet glimpsed her quarry.

At any rate, Morgan herself presumably wasn't

warned yet. That was something. Woodley hurried on up the gorge. He had difficulty in breathing, somehow. The water in the bowl choked him. He replenished it from the stream and went on. He caught sight of the oak.

It was as he had remembered, with the little root-cavern under it. So this was Merlin's prison!

Now for it. Woodley refilled the bowl, climbed the bank, and experimentally approached the tree. There was no sign of Vivienne—as yet.

His skin felt hot and dry. He would have liked to immerse himself in the brook, but it was too small, and, in any case, there was no time to waste. The spell Bleys had given him—

Woodley plucked seven oak leaves and laid them in a row on the ground before the tree. He put his face into the bowl, took a deep breath, and lifted his head. Now—

His skin was burning like fire. Woodley knew he had to get back to the water fast—not merely to breathe it, but to keep himself from shriveling up like a beached jellyfish.

He said the spell, a short one, articulating each word carefully.

There was a clap of thunder, a streak of lightning, and, with a terrific crash, the bole of the oak split asunder. Woodley had a moment's fear that the commotion would attract Vivienne.

The tree's trunk was hollow. A man stepped out.

It was Merlin Ambrosius, a tall, dignified man with a hooked nose and a long white beard. He looked exactly like a professor of history, except for his brown robe and hood.

"Merlin!" Woodley said, his voice tense with relief, and hastily dipped his face into the bowl. Let Vivienne come now! Merlin was free!

"Oh, dear, dear," said the wizard, in a querulous voice. "You . . . you're not Arthur? But no; I can see that you're not. Why do people meddle so? Why can't you mind your own business?"

Woodley said, quite stupefied, "I . . . I've freed you from the oak where Vivienne imprisoned you."

Merlin threw up his hands. "What in Heaven's name ever gave you that fantastic idea? One of Vivienne's stories, I suppose. She wouldn't want the truth to get out, of course. Name of Mider! For centuries she's been looking for this oak, trying to find me, ever since I shut myself up here."

"You—shut yourself up?"

"I presume you've met Vivienne," Merlin said, with furious patience. "A lovely girl. A charming girl. But she talks like a magpie. Scandal, scandal, scandal, morning, noon, night and Sabbaths. She followed me all around Britain—I couldn't get away from the wench. How she loved me! And how she talked! I couldn't think straight. Every time I tried to work out a spell, she'd begin babbling about the affair Duke Some-

body had with Dame Somebody Else. Oh, no!" Merlin said emphatically. "It wasn't Vivienne who shut me up in this oak. I shut myself up, and I've had a very pleasant time since, thank you, except when Vivienne got dangerously close. I've been napping, off and on, and working out some lovely new magic. But I was always afraid that beautiful, brainless, chattering magpie would find me some day and make my life a hell again.

"But no more," Merlin said very firmly. "I've worked out a new spell for which there's no antidote. It begins *somnus eternatis*, and I'm going to use it to shut myself up again in this oak. When I've done that, not the devil himself can ever open this tree again. I should have used it long ago, but I didn't think a few centuries would matter much, one way or another."

"But!" said Woodley, who had been alternating between the bowl and staring at Merlin. "You won't help me, then?"

"Oh, I'll help you," the wizard grunted. "That'll be easy enough. I'll take off the wet magic and protect you against Morgan and Vivienne—as I read your mind, that's what you want. It won't take long. Then I'll just go back in my tree, and after I've used my new spell, it'll be sealed inside and out. I can't get out, ever, and nobody can ever get in. Arthur won't need me, anyway, when he comes again. He'll have Excalibur."

There was a *swoosh* in the air behind Woodley. He whirled, to see Vivienne flying down at him, her hair streaming behind her. So the thunderclap of the oak's opening had summoned her!

"Messire Arthur!" she shrieked. "So there you are!"

Merlin let out a whoop of dismay and stepped back into the tree. His voice rose in a hurried incantation.

"Somnus eternatis—"

There was a joyous shriek from Vivienne. "Merlin!" she screamed. "My love Merlin! At last!"

She swooped down, past Woodley, knocking the bowl from his hands. Merlin was inside the hollow oak, frantically intoning his spell. And then Vivienne had reached him, had flung her arms around the struggling wizard's neck, was planting passionate kisses on his bearded cheeks—

Crash!

Lightning blazed; thunder rolled; and the oak slammed shut like two halves of a door. Woodley, automatically holding his breath, stood gaping at the tree. Merlin and Vivienne had vanished.

He scooped up the unbroken bowl and raced back to the stream, where he replenished it. His body was burning like fire, and he hastily splashed water upon himself. Then, the bowl refilled, he clambered up the bank to the tree and plucked seven oak leaves.

He repeated Bleys' incantation, but nothing happened. He tried it again and again—six times in

all. No use. Merlin and Vivienne were sealed within the oak.

Woodley went back and sat in a shallow pool, bending forward occasionally to breathe. Where his skin was exposed to the air, it was sheer agony. He longed to immerse his whole body, but the stream was too shallow here, and he could only pour water from the bowl over his skin. It didn't help much.

If Merlin had only had time to take off the wet magic spell—if Vivienne had not arrived when she did—

Woodley gnawed at his lips. If he could only get help—

If he had only accepted Excalibur—

Help was far away. Woodley knew he had to stay near water, where he could replenish the bowl from time to time. With a hollow reed, he might contrive to aerate the water he carried with him, but he could not expose his skin to air for very long. Like a jellyfish, he could not live in sunlight and air.

If he could find a deep pool—

But there was none. The shallow stream raced steeply down the gorge without pausing. Only in the lake itself could Woodley survive.

"No," he thought. "I'll stay here. It'll be an easier death. Bohart—"

But the weakness of his flesh betrayed him. Minute by minute the burning agony crawling along his skin became worse. It was intolerable—unendurable.

There was no other way. He must return to the lake. And—Morgan le Fay.

Woodley began to stumble down the gorge. After all, he need not go back to the castle itself. He could hide somewhere, under the water, where Morgan might not find him—

The cleft ended. Woodley's feet splashed into deepening water.

For a very brief moment, he saw a mirage. It seemed to him that an arm, draped in white samite, rose from the smooth surface of the lake, and that it brandished a sword that flamed with intolerable brightness in the sunlight.

It was gone. Woodley splashed deeper. It was only a mirage.

No revisions—this time.

The grateful coolness of the water soothed his burning skin. It closed over his head. Woodley dropped flat on the lake bottom, luxuriating in the element that meant relief to his parched throat and lungs. For a long time he lay there, unconscious of his surroundings. It was enough merely to relax.

The lake grew darker. The sun dropped behind the peaks. An inquisitive trout investigated Woodley's hair and flicked away as he stirred.

Merlin—Bleys—no help there. He must find a

hiding place. That cave in the Shaking Rock. Morgan might not find him there.

His body was no longer afire. Slowly Woodley rose and began to descend the slope of the lake bottom. A green twilight surrounded him.

Then he saw—something—slowly stirring at his feet.

For a moment Woodley's shocked eyes could not quite comprehend what he saw. He gave a little choking gasp of nausea. It was not the actual appearance of the—thing—so much as the unmistakable fact that it had once been Sir Bohart.

And it still lived, after a fashion.

Morgan's chess game was finished.

Woodley shut his eyes, squeezing the lids tight together, as he fought down the sickness of his human flesh, revolting from that which Morgan had done. Through the dark came a voice.

"She plays at chess with Bleys now," it said.

Woodley tried to speak, but could not. That which should have had no voice went on thickly: "She dared not slay him before, since he held Excalibur for Arthur. But the hour for Arthur's coming has passed, she said to me before I died, and she has no more fear."

The thing did not speak again, for it had disintegrated.

Woodley opened his eyes then. The green twilight had darkened. He could see little, except a great black shadow far below that was the castle. To the right was another blot of darkness—the Shaking Rock, perhaps.

He could hide there—

No. Morgan would find him. Woodley half turned to retrace his steps, but remembrance of the agony he had suffered in air halted him. He could not endure that again.

But—it would be better than playing chess with Morgan. Woodley knew, at last, what that euphemism cloaked. Poor Bleys!

He thrust that thought, and the memory of Bohart, out of his mind. He knew, now, what he had to do. It was the only way. A clean, final solution, with sharp steel, thrust through his heart. It would be the period to his failure.

His hand went to his belt, but the sword was not there. He had removed it, Woodley remembered, in his apartment after the slaughter of the undine. Well—the dagger, then.

That, too, was gone. He was unarmed.

Briefly a racking sickness shook Woodley. He dared not remain alive now, to suffer the same fate as Bohart. Again he glanced back.

Well, he would not leave the lake again. It would mean unnecessary suffering. Somehow he would find a way to kill himself. Even if he had to enter the castle again—

It came to that, in the end. There was no other way. No weapons existed under the lake, except

in Morgan's stronghold. Woodley knew which door to use—the one Bleys had showed him. He was encouraged by the thought that he was not apt to encounter Morgan. She would be busy—

Nevertheless, he kept to the shadows as he crept along the corridor. A curious darkness seemed to have fallen over the castle. The vague, sourceless light had dimmed. It was utterly silent.

He saw no one—not even Nurmala, as he cautiously hurried to his apartment. But there were no weapons in evidence. They had been removed.

Well—there might be a dagger in Bleys' room. He went there. The door was closed and locked, and Woodley dared not risk the noise of breaking it down.

The armory?

Fear mounted within him as he went through the castle. Something was crouching in the shadows, watching him. Worst of all was the thought that Morgan, somewhere here, was playing at chess with Bleys.

Bleys—Bohart—Morgan!

At the end of a hall he saw a door agape, and beyond it the sheen of steel. The armory, then. As he hurried forward, a curtain billowed out at his side, and Woodley froze, seeing what was embroidered on that white surface. A coiled snake, with a golden star above its lifted head. Morgan's apartment.

Somehow Woodley crept past. Somehow he reached the armory, and chose a sword at random. An ordinary enough blade, but sharp. Not Excalibur, though. His lips twisted at the thought.

This would be a clean death. Or, perhaps, a dagger would be better. He selected one.

But his fingers remained curled about the sword hilt. He had forgotten how strangely satisfying it was to hold a blade. The weapon was like an extension of his own body, giving him a power he had not possessed before.

Woodley looked at the dagger. Then he thrust it into his belt. He hefted the sword.

Not Excalibur. He could never hope to hold Cut-Steel now. He could never hope to slay Morgan, or even to face her—

Woodley's face changed. His hand tightened on the sword hilt. He was remembering his last words to Bleys.

"I think I've got a better idea. I'm going to try it, anyhow. If it doesn't work, I'll be back to fight Morgan."

Fight her? Without Excalibur? The thought was mockingly hopeless. Yet, oddly, a curious sort of anger was beginning to glow within Woodley.

From the beginning, Morgan had had it all her own way. Everyone was afraid of her. Secure in her dark magic, she had done exactly as she liked, trampling roughshod over those who got in

her way. Perhaps she had felt some fear that Arthur would come again, and destroy her. Now that menace was gone. Morgan was confident—and with reason.

No one had dared to oppose her. The thought of Morgan's triumph now was suddenly unendurable to Woodley. She had not even troubled to follow and destroy him. She knew that he would skulk back, and perhaps kill himself to save her the trouble of . . . of crushing him, as she would crush a fly.

Bleys—Bohart—the thing that had been Bohart—Why had the armory door been left open? Had Morgan known what Woodley intended to do?

Sudden anger darkened his face. Damn her! He had failed—yes. But this—

Very well. He had to die; there was no possible escape now. But at least he could give Morgan the trouble of having to kill him herself!

Hot with anger, Woodley whirled and hurried back along the passage. At the white drapery he hesitated for a brief moment. Then he flung it aside and stepped across the threshold.

The room was empty. The wall that faced him was not a wall. It was, he thought, a curtain of black cobwebs that hung from ceiling to floor. Or it was a tapestry of darkness, intangible, shifting—more of Morgan's magic.

Damn Morgan, anyway!

Woodley marched forward. Out of the dark curtain two armored knights came pacing, visors concealing their faces. They lifted their swords in grim silence.

Woodley grinned. He had held his own against Sir Bohart—this would be no pigsticking, anyway. He'd give Morgan some trouble before she destroyed him.

He did not wait for the attack; he ran in, lightly as a cat, feinting at one of the knights. A reasonless confidence seemed to distill in him from the feel of the sword against his hand. Arthur must have felt like this, long ago, when he held Excalibur— As the knight's brand swept down Woodley, unencumbered by heavy armor, sprang aside, and his sword point slipped through the bars of the knight's visor. It stuck there, trapped by bone.

The other attacker cut at Woodley. There was no time to recover a sword; his own was stuck beyond retrieving and the other man's had shattered to flinders against the stone floor. Woodley felt pain bite into his arm. He hurled himself forward, grappling with the cold, unyielding steel of the body before him, fumbling for the dagger at his belt. Almost of its own volition his heel hooked behind the other's ankle. They crashed down together, armor thundering.

Woodley's dagger grated across steel and found that vulnerable spot beneath the arm where the cuirass always fails its wearer. The sharp blade

sank and rose and sank again.

Woodley tore the sword from the dying knight's hand and leaped up. Out of the dark curtain of cobweb a serpent came sliding, coil upon shining coil. A point of light danced above its head. Morgan's emblem—Morgan's familiar.

Woodley did not wait for the great coils to loop him—and they were not proof against the sword he wielded. The snake's thick blood poured through its gashed side as it threw itself about him, bruising, tremendous. Woodley hacked blindly.

The flags were slippery with blood when he rose from the loosening folds of the serpent above whose head the star no longer trembled.

On unsteady legs Woodley went forward to meet a laughing, crimson thing that was hideously anthropomorphic. He left it more crimson still, but no longer laughing. And this time nothing else emerged from the veil.

Beyond there was only a faint crimson glow through which shapeless shadows loomed. Dimly in the red dark he saw Morgan at the end of the room rising from a table. Bleys sat across from her, lifting a pale, incredulous face as he saw Woodley. He was apparently unharmed as yet, but Bleys did not speak.

Morgan turned her terrible gaze upon the newcomer. As always, Woodley's eyes slipped away. He could not meet it. But he saw that her strange, lovely face was expressionless. She was not afraid. Of course not. Nothing could harm her—

He moved forward in the gloom, lifting his sword. Morgan's hand rose, and the blade crumbled in his grasp. Woodley stared down stupidly, a dull anger brightening in his mind behind the pain and the despair. He tore out his dagger and lurched forward.

Morgan's hand rose again, and the dagger fell to dust.

Now he stood unarmed, facing Morgan across the gulf of crimson shadows. But the confidence that had distilled from the feel of the sword in his hand remained. He was not afraid. His courage and strength had not lain in the blade alone.

He took a long step forward into the dimness. Morgan burned white a dozen yards away, blotting out everything else. The glimmer of her pale throat made his fingers twitch unconsciously. He stumbled another step forward.

At his knee in the gloom something bulky touched him. He looked down. It was a stone anvil, and a sword stood embedded deep in the stone.

A weapon! A weapon against Morgan. He thought of no more than that as his fingers curled lovingly about the jeweled hilt. There was a moment of hesitation before the blade slid free,

and the hilt quivered in his palm as if it were alive.

But when he swung the sword up shoulder high it was as if he lifted a suddenly flaming torch.

The man who held Excalibur stood motionless, squinting against the brilliance of his own weapon, feeling the power that had once gone coursing through Arthur Pendragon's veins flooding his own. The white blaze of Cut-Steel routed the shadows of the room. Bleys slipped down from his stool and knelt, head bowed to that strong pale fire.

There was utter silence.

Then Morgan said: "You have come again, my

enemy. No magic of mine has power over you now. The lake is no longer a prison for you. Your star rises. The sword Excalibur is drawn again to save England, and it will not fail." Her calm voice deepened a little, revengefully. "But you will not live to take joy in your triumph, Arthur, my enemy! The touch of Excalibur's hilt is as deadly as the touch of its blade. When all is won, on some dark tomorrow, you shall die."

The sword was a flame of living light. The man who held it did not answer for a moment. Then--

"Yes," he said, very softly. "But you shall die today."

He moved forward.

THE END.