

ALLEGORY

The Story of Fantasite's Progress from the City of Innocence to the Palace of Imagination

J. Speer, Esq.

I

OUR STORY will begin with the time when Fantasite was a twelve-year-old lad, living with his family in the City of Innocence. He was not just like other children, and would as soon play by himself as in a group. So it was that one day as he sat building his dreary alone, he was aware there stood by him a young woman, not many years his senior, and clad in iridescent raiment.

She seated herself on a mossy log, and began to talk with him; and throught the long afternoon they held converse. Never before had an older person deigned to talk seriously with Fantasite, and perhaps it was this that joyed him as much as her surpassing beauty, for he was only a child. But he knew, when she rose to go, that no other afternoon had ever been so wonderful as this one, and he beseeed her to stay, or promise to return.

"I may not be permitted to return for a long time, until the stars are right again; but if you truly wish to see me again, my home is on the highest peak of the Reason range, and you may find me there. But it is a long road, beset with more hardships than you not."

"I will follow you," he said, and thrilled at his own words, "to the ends of the earth. What is your name, so that I can ask my way to your home?"

"My name is Fantasy, and my home is the Palace of Imagination. Good luck, Fantasite."

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, all careworn, Fantasite set out. He did not trouble to tell his mother whether he was going, for he had no conception of the time it would take. Outside the City gates, he breathed deeply and broke into a little run with his eyes open to be on the way. But the beauties of the wayside made him anticiated to slow his pace when he was tired, and he walked along enjoying the Identification flowers, peering now and then to smell more deeply of one or another; and he picked a bouquet of Slan blossoms (though he did not then know their name), thinking it would make a fine gift to give to Fantasy when he should see her.

The road bended upward, and the sun rose high in the sky, so that presently he began to thirst, and for some time he saw no more flowers. Then, up on a hillside, he espied a spring, and hurried toward it. There was a magazine man who stood beside the spring, who said, "You want very much to drink, child, so it must be worth a great deal to you. No one drinks of this spring but pays me twenty-five cents first."

"I have only ten cents," said Fantasite, drawing back a little, embarrassed.

"Then you cannot wish so very much to drink. On your way."

Along the road a place, however, a stream which flowed from the spring crossed under Old Man's Bridge, and here Fantasite stopped to slake his thirst. The water was a little dirty, but Fantasite in his innocence had no fear of germs, so he drank long and deeply, without paying a bill. Then he rested for a while on the abutment, and as the slenflowers had become somewhat wilted with the heat, he cast them away. Almost he gave up his quest of Fantasy's palace, content to stay here where there reeked an inexhaustible supply of delicious water, but something in the tinkling of it as it ran over the green rocks reminded him of the way she had laughed at whimsies of his which no other older person had ever seen to be humorous. With a sigh, he went to drink once more, then started again on his way. The mountains seemed as far off as ever.

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them. And when he passed the lightning-struck mountain, his attention was on the skylark singing in the light of Dawn's left hand.

At length, having passed beyond Lone-lincoln town, he felt that he could sleep, and turning into the half-open door of a large barn, lay down upon a pile of straw.

THE HIGH SUN SHINING in the doorway awoke him, awoke him to a consciousness that he was very hungry. Poor fellow, he had not eaten for more than twenty-four hours. As he emerged from the barn, he saw a gadget tree laden with fruits, and proceeded to fill up on them. Fortunately, they were ripe and good, and he suffered no ill effects.

A little farther on, a farmer standing before his house hailed him. As Fantasite approached, the farmer said, "Boy, do you like gadgets? I'm a gadget farmer, and I need some help about the place."

"Well," Fantasite said, "really, I am bound for the mountains. I do like gadgets, though."

"Bound for the mountains, eh? Then you'll need a bit of money along the way. Why don't you work for me for a few months, and make some money? It always helps, whatever you may be wanting to do."

Fantasite was about to decline with thanks -- the word "months" frightened him -- when he saw someone else come out of the farmhouse.

"This is my daughter, P.S.D.," said the farmer. "I've been trying to persuade the young man to stay and work for us a while."

"Wouldn't you like to learn about the way we do things?" she asked Fantasite. "There's a lot more to gadgets than just the fruit you see in the market. You'll appreciate them a lot more if you know how they got that way. Let me show you our pseudo-scientific mist-sprayers, and our cider press, and how we graft on new ideas." As she took his hand to lead him, he was lost.

SOME MONTHS LATER, however, one day as Fantasite was pushing around the long handle on the cider press, the endless revolving motion seemed to evoke a similar whirling in his thoughts. "Gadget sauce and gadget pie, and gadget dumplings and gadget preserves and gadgets au gratin and gadget cider to drink.... I'm sick of eating gadgets. There must be something else to eat in the world. Even the butter we churn from our BEMs' milk has a gadgety taste to it. Uncle Hugo is nice and P.S.D. would be if she had any brains, but how can they compare to my memory of Fantasy? I'm going to hit the road again when the work's all done this fall."

The farmer would have had him stay on thruout the winter, doing such odd jobs as might turn up. "I'm thinking of branching out," he said. "Going to sell this farm to Tad O'Connor and buy a couple of pieces up the valley a bit. I'll need a hunky boy to help me clear the land." But Fantasite's mind was made up.

Sitting in an inn near Christmas time, he was a little surprised to find that he was eating fried gadgets with BEM's butter and enjoying them. "But that's because there are other things to eat besides," he told himself. "How glad I am that Clayton pastries can be bought now! and sometimes the nuts brought in by the golden ships are very delectable. But they are harder to get as I move up into the mountains."

HIS DINNER OVER, he joined a Discussions group about the fireplace, almost the first time he had done so. He was surprised, then, to find how much their talk suited him. And some of the travelers were not much older than he. As the conversations developed one out of another, it began to appear that many of these youths, like him self, were in quest of something up in the mountains. Listening to their descriptions of what they sought, he knew that none was exactly like his Fantasy, none quite so noble, but many bore resemblance to her. Perhaps she had sisters and brothers scattered thru this whole high region. He warmed at the unaccustomed feeling of being among companions with a similar purpose.

The next morning, as they were starting out, one of the travelers suggested that they organize themselves into a caravan, the better to pursue their journey.

Fantasite enthusiastically fell in with the idea, and so they started out together. By pooling their resources they were able to purchase some pabald packhorses to carry their loads, and thus make better time. And so they went weaving about the foothills, in response to one or another's wishes, and for a while Fantasite almost lost sight of his quest as he traveled hither and yon to the accomodation of some companion seeker's route. But presently dissension broke out, or perhaps they lost interest in the caravan, so he left the pack animals and headed upward again with three or four companions.

AS THEY JOURNEYED THIS way, they passed a large neon-decorated cave mouth in a cliff face, before which was a sign anno uncing: "Continuous showing. All new. No charge! Pay what you think it's worth when you come out."

"This looks like our meat", said his eldest fellow-traveler, and they all walked in. Brilliant shadows danced on a screen at the lower end of the room, and sound effects came from concealed loudspeakers. For a while Fantasite was interested in the story, setting, and characters depicted; some of the feminine leads looked like poor imitations of his Fantasy.

But presently he began to sicken at the shallowness of it all, and looked aside to see if his companion was enjoying it. The fellow was still eating it up. Then Fantasite looked at the row behind to note the reaction of his other friends, and saw a huge spider-bodied monster sitting them up. With a scream he bolted for a door marked "Exit".

HERE WAS AN INTERMINABLE LABYRINTH of caves. At the first intersection he came to, sat a little man in a tall conical hat, perched upon a truncated stalagmite, and droning: "Yes, I know they had static being broadcast on all wavelengths so that they couldn't have radioed their troops to advance, but maybe they used a wire telephone." Fantasite tried to ask the way of him, but meeting no success, wandered on.

At the next corner, where three tunnels intersected, sat an exact duplicate of the first little man, and he was saying, "We may infer that the heat was very great indeed, as this alloy happens to have a high melting point."

Further on was another dwarf, who intoned, "He had failed to be informed of this development because on her previous visit to his office she had assumed that he had already been told when he was making his inquiries three days before."

"Ordinarily this effect would be impossible under the conditions given," chanted another, "but the effect of this unknown element in the atmosphere may have been to prevent the normal reactions that one would expect in the circumstances."

The last one he remembered was muttering, "It might be thought that they could have avoided this difficulty by passing out of the plane of the ecliptic, but due to the fact that the planets were scattered at various places around the sun rather than strung out in a single line, it was necessary, their fuel being so limited, to take advantage of the centrifugal force at the equator."

Fantasite fainted, and when he revived, the stars were bright above.

ONE STORMY DAY in late winter as the young traveler was crossing snowcovered land belonging to the Old Teck ranch, stumbling over the jagged Porphyrific and vernal rocks that scarred the landscape, he found his eyesight failing him. The moment he noticed it, it deteriorated at a greatly increased rate, and almost the last thing he saw was a little wattle-and-daub hut at the edge of a lake. The Hermit who lived there took him in and ministered to him. But in the long weeks that Fantasite lay waiting for his vision to return, the Hermit nearly drove him mad with doubts.

"How long ago was it you saw the woman? Older than you, wasn't she? What are you pursuing her for? Is she worth all the trouble and pain you've suffered? By the time you find her she will have forgotten you--may be married to another. All right, so you aren't thinking now of marrying her. But mark my word, by the time you do find her--if you do--you will be much older than you are now. And she, hoo hoo, will be older still. She may have grown old and ugly."

"She will never age!" Fantasite cried in desperate defiance.

"How did you know?"

said the Hermit in a changed tone. "It is true that she will never grow old. She changes with time, of course, but to her true worshiper she will ever be the embodiment of his ideal. Perhaps because her worshiper makes his desires be that which she is. I loved her once myself; but I have met other women, women of more character and experience, and one can learn to love them just as he once loved Fantasy. Meet Duke History's daughter Romance, my son. Or look upon the classic beauty of Melpomene, and forget your child-love for Fantasy. Better yet, turn from all womankind, and steep yourself in the lore one may learn at the scholars' monastery."

chose me to favor; how can I be unfaithful now?"

"Have you ever known any other beautiful ladies, boy?"

"No. They had never paid attention to me, because I was only a boy with dreams; but for what I am, Fantasy came to me, and as long as I am true to myself I shall seek her."

At this the Hermit fell silent.

One day as spring was breaking even in the mountains, Fantasite was ready to set forth again. "Only be careful henceforth," cautioned the Hermit, "not to gaze too directly at the blinding white of snow. In the mountains where you must go there will be many snowfields to cross, yes, and glaciers too. Fair-seeming are these ice-sheets, but in places there is no depth to them, and only real insight will enable you to distinguish false footing from true. In particular avoid those which are marked with the signs as being of thickness ten or fifteen centimeters. Many people disport on these (and they are good enough for such light loads as these people carry), but only one, which lies much farther along your way, is less than twenty centimeters and yet suitable for you. Now, as token of my good will, take with you this commonplace boot, which you will find useful." It made his pack heavy, but the boy did not know how to refuse.

MANY PETTY ANNOYANCES beset Fantasite that day. In one small mountain town he had his way blocked for hours by a parade of anti-stapleists. Again he was seized by an enthusiast and dragged to a chapel where a priest named Orlin was telling the worshipful congregation how wonderful they were. A more serious inconvenience was when he found the highway the scene of a bloody war. A sentry sprang out at him, demanding, "Under which king, William or Charles? Speak or die!"

"Warin!" gasped Fantasite, and then swore that he had never heard of either faction. He was obliged to turn aside and cut across country to pick up the road again. Here was an ice-sheet liberally labeled with the thickness of the ice, but it was constantly changing, now twenty-five, now fifteen. Moreover the breadth of it fluctuated, and at last it ended in a sheer drop. Just below the edge of this, he saw a new political point in the ice, and draped over it a frayed piece of wordcounter's tape, but the fate of the alpinist was not hard to guess. Shuddering, he turned aside, and worked up a rock chimney to a section of the road above.

Lying in the middle of the road was an old man with a long white beard, fast asleep, but muttering in his sleep. Fantasite waked him and inquired if he knew which way led toward the Reason range and Fantasy's palace. "Certainly I know the way," replied the dotard. "I am one of her ground-wardens. However, I do not believe in her existence. You have no conception of the tremendous distances involved, or you would not either."

"My do you serve her, then?"

"I suppose a man must live. Friend of her family. Have a gadget." Fantasite shook his head. "Don't care for them much myself, though growing them is my job. Up this road here, then right at the crossroads." He curled up to go to sleep again.

IN A LONELY MOUNTAIN SHELTER where he stopped to spend the night, Fantasite met one of the former members of the caravan. "Still plodding over the glaciers?" asked the fellow. "Why don't you use boots and climb directly up? It's much the better way."

"I have no

boots," said Fantasite, "except one that a hermit gave me. I've never tried it on. He said it was a commonplace boot."

"What!" exclaimed his companion. "That is one of the best. Tomorrow I must show you how to weird with it. Never heard of weirding? Bless my soul, brother, where have you been? Best way to get over these mountains. Who was it you were seeking? I'm looking for one of the Norn sisters, myself." Fantasite told him. "Well, weirding won't get you all the way to her place, but it will help you over this first chain. I'll show you in the morning. Too bad you don't have another boot, good as that one is. Beware of the man with one boot; he will make only one track."

ON THE MORROW, then, with a little instruction, Fantasite was stepping lightly up the mountainside. He was surprised to see so often the birds of purple passage, which had seldom appeared in the coastal plain. Though he knew now that a long journey lay ahead, he found himself better adjusted to the conditions of traveling, and enjoying such pleasures as could be found in it.

Every so often he changed the boot from one foot to the other, but the unequal strain quickly wore him out. Stopping at a shop labeled "Swanson Store", he explained his need. "I never sell boots without a trade-in," said the proprietor, "but perhaps for that particular one of yours, plus some cash, I could supply you with a pair of the Burroughs brand. Give it to me and let me see what I can find in the back of the store."

After he had been waiting an hour or so, Fantasite wondered if Swanson had forgotten him. He walked thru the door that should have led to a back room, and fell flat on his face in the snow. Swanson had disappeared.

Fantasite had learned something from his friend of the cabin, however, and binding mandrake roots and wolfbane leaves to his shoes, was able to make better time than formerly. Nevertheless it was a week before he had reached the crest of this first mountain ridge. From there, thru the purple haze of distance, he could see the main Reason range. Somewhere in the heights of that, he knew, was his beloved Fantasy.

II

THE VALLEY BETWEEN was checked with forests and open places, with here and there the purple shimmer of a lake. As Fantasite eagerly made his way down the now snowless side of the mountain, he picked out towns here and there below. The road he was following led directly into a large city.

As he approached, he could see that it was a festive day. Huge banners were stretched across the street, with gold lettering, embroidered red, reading "Welcome Fans!" A perfect stranger came hurrying up to him, seized him eagerly by the hand, and greeted him warmly. "Read these," he said, thrusting several leaflets into Fantasite's hand. "They're trying to put something over on us. Earl Williams--that's the chairman--is asking blood transfusions to revive a corpse so that he can control it. Don't let him hogwash you."

With that the individual rushed away, and Fantasite was left puzzling over the screaming headlines on the leaflets. Another chap, younger, approached and said, "You look like a guy that knows a lot about this. How about writing me an article on it?"

Fantasite, who had never been asked to write before, was so pleased that he felt he should oblige, but before he could answer, someone shouted "This way quick! They're serving food!" Immediately our hero was swept along in the rush, and found himself in the midst of a struggling mob, fighting to get to a table. A surge hurled him against it, but looking around he found nothing within reach but a tired-looking vanilla wafer and half a pickle. "Lemonade and red pop this way!" someone cried, but Fantasite fought free from the crowd's new push.

Walking about the town, he saw many individuals doing interesting-looking things. Here were two slinking along, trying to hide a gurgling suitcase that they carried. There a group had heads close together, occasionally bursting out in a raucous laugh. In a park, someone stood on a box exhorting the benchsitters in a strange jargon. Everywhere there were stands selling brightly-colored little magazines,

but Fantasite battered his money pocket and backed away. He could not keep them from giving him free ones, however, and soon found them adding a great deal to the weight of his pack.

When he sat down to rest, a youth about his own age accosted him. "Well, isn't it? This was worth riding the rods to see. You're going to be at the one next year, of course. Bigger and better than even this!" Fantasite held his silence, torn with conflicting desires. This did mightily appeal to him. He could see some of his old caravan companions about, and wondered if they had abandoned their quests. He would hate to permanently renounce either this or his quest.

But when the youth began speaking about the conditions he was on, and his need for assistance in working on next year's fair, Fantasite's eyes widened and rose from the bench. "Ho," he said to himself as he walked away; "Excelsior!"

AT THE OFFERING OF THE BIRD, as he was further loading his pack with provisions in a little grocery store, the proprietor became interested in his route. Said he, "If you're going on to the next town right away, I wonder if you'd take a package for me. Follow down the Fish-hook Garage there, no trade things back and forth." Fantasite agreed to deliver the goods, but was a bit staggered at the weight of the load that was thrust upon him. The jacking part of the roadway worsened his condition, and he made very slow progress as he stumbled on toward the valley bottom.

Then descended upon him a horde of Worldly Gnomes, about three feet high, and jabbed at him with their hot-red forks, forcing him to turn off onto a side road. As dusk fell, he became lost, and could not tell whether he was going toward his goal or away from it.

At last he cried, "I should give it all up! Though I cannot return to the City of Innocence, yet there are other cities on the coastal plain where living could be comfortable. Anything would be better than this terrible and hopeless shuffling about. But I have come too far to go back."

A tall man in evening clothes, with a black patent leather seal, stood before him. "I am a taker of wigs, among other wares," he said, glancing Fantasite's head, "and if you would contribute the bill of yours to the coating of other wigs' self-crests, I can transport you as you have just wished, and deliver you to the garage." He produced slippers, the bargain was concluded, and Fantasite, minus each of his self-crests, found himself on the edge of a town named Sansify.

MR. ARD HINKLE, a barber's assistant in the town, had took on the part of choir-boy in the local Bohemian Church. In this position he made the acquaintance of a number of feminine prisoners, and protected some of them on his own time, though he did not really like any of them.

Presently he quit his barber job to become a traveling salesman for travel trinkets manufactured by the father of one of them. The flat monotony of the prairie over which he traveled recalled him to mind on the mechanically-introduced variations in the almost uniform trinkets he sold. There accustomed to blue mountains and dark valleys, and the worldful and always significant designs of nature, he began to find his new job and situation intolerable. And often he dreamed of Fantasy.

He quit that job in disgust and became clerk in an insurance company, a very safe and reliable business, with a good chance of working up to vice-president in thirty years. But still he was dissatisfied, and his nature was such that the only release from this dissatisfaction seemed to lie in the direction of the blue mountain ranges. Yet he would not admit this to himself, and he never spoke of it to any other.

He had dwelt in this manner for a year and a day when he became so incognito one evening as to express something of his discontent to a girl he was visiting. "Why, there is no easy solution to that," she said. "My mother knows where the lotus grows."

Somewhat, that shocked Fantasite into facing his situation squarely. Thinking how that night, he revolved the problem furiously in his mind. Out of the lotus, and his independence would come--but he would never really be himself, continuous with his his that was. When he had reached the dingy little room where he lived, he stood in the middle of the floor and called, "Mandrill!"

Immediately the man with the two-color cloak was there, and seemed to answer Fantasite's call as if he had found him, on the same terms as before.

After teleporting him, he directed him to the highway, and after a few words of advice which Fantasite had already given himself, disappeared.

THE NEXT DAY it was like a half-forgotten nightmare, and Fantasite walked along joyously breathing the country air and the odors of the identification flowers. The highway continued downward toward the dark stream that flowed thru the valley. The flowers that bloomed along the way were in part familiar, in part new to him. Sweetest smelling were the varieties of slans, but here and there the strange odor of a different type, a Brandco or it, appealed to his sharpened senses.

He wandered off the road some distance picking blooms of the Brandco sort to make a boutonniere, or perhaps really from an impulse to possess them more fully than the mere smelling. Finally he paused, thinking he should have enough for a while, and a dark shadow fell over him. Looking up, he saw a huge giant standing over him.

"Why are you picking my flowers?" the voice came bellowing down to him.

"I'm sorry, sir. I thought they were casual ones, growing along the road."

"You didn't notice that you crossed a line back there, I suppose," roared the giant. "Anyone enters my land at his own peril. And since I'm hungry right now, it's very perilous indeed."

Fantasite didn't realize he wasn't kidding until he found himself under the giant's arm, being carried toward a huge house set back in the woods.

"People that just smell the flowers, I usually let go by," came the monstrous mutter, "but collectors are my meat. You should feel proud, young fellow, that you're going to be eaten by the great Giant Komnix." He seemed to think that exceptionally funny, and slapped his knees with laughter.

Desperately, Fantasite twisted out of his grasp, and darted into a thicket of bushes. They scratched his face and tore at his clothes, but with the Giant roaring in pursuit, he paid that no heed. At last, panting, he paused deep in a brier jungle a mile from the house. He could hear Komnix still roaring, but it was far off his track, so he bethought himself how to return to the highway.

AS HE STOOD THUS CONSIDERING, a shrunken little woman appeared and beckoned to him. "You'll be safe from the giant in my cottage," she said, "though it's on land that he is supposed to own. It's really a very nice place, too. Flowers and all. Come, and I'll doctor up your scratches with some concealing wax I have."

Fantasite gratefully followed her, and they came to a little farmhouse beside a patch of cultivated land. The woman said apologetically, "It's not much now, but we have plans for making it grow. The bright-eyed fourteen-year locusts ruined a lot of this country around here, but we've discovered a way to use their bodies for fertilizer, so we're glad to have them. We even put up that scarecrow to keep the birds of passage away, because they might frighten the locusts." They came into the house. "Sit down here and my cousin Howard will bind up your wounds. Howard!" A large man appeared in a doorway. "Take care of this boy, while I get supper going."

Came the dawn, Fantasite felt much better and offered to help about the farm for a day as an expression of his appreciation. He did not feel so happy when he found that the job was grafting gadgets, but carried it out manfully. About the middle of the afternoon, clouds came up, and with a bit of thundering, rain commenced. It was red and thick, like the sea he had once seen. Fantasite sat on the porch mixing paints under the old woman's direction while she peeled gadgets and Howard worked over some old manuscripts.

"We're going to have a lot of people working for us pretty soon," the old woman said, "but right now we have to do nearly all the work ourselves. Wouldn't be happy if we didn't I guess. I like to have everything about the farm done the way I like it, and I guess the best way to do that is do as much of it as you can yourself."

"The rain is good for the gadgets," Howard remarked. "Doesn't hurt the flowers any either. The flowers are really what we'll make our money on. We intend to have the biggest and best bouquets in

the county, especially the biggest."

"Silly thing," remarked his cousin.

FANTASITE WAS INTERESTED to be on his way again next morning, but a strange lassitude possessed him. "You're still a little sickly," he said. "Take some of this ECG broth, and it'll make you feel better. You can stay over today if you like, and work a little this afternoon."

Seven months later, as Fantasite was clearing a new piece of land, he came upon a small stream that drew from the mountain ridge rather than the dubious springs they had been using. He tasted the water to see if it was good, and when he did so, his brain cleared for a moment, and he realized with horror that he had broken his journey again far—how many months? What had caused this long clouding of his mind? Was it the thick odor of the flower gardens, or the polluted water from the Mercury springs, or some darker spell worked on him by the old woman and Howard?

He did not know, but he determined to leave immediately, lest the cloud drop before his eyes again. With another draft from the mountain-fed stream, he struck his ax into a stump and went down the woods to the nearest road.

He WALKED FOR HOURS WITHOUT finding anyone of whom to inquire the way, and began to feel that the road was turning away from the direction of the Reason Mountains. Presently a side road appeared, and he turned into it, hoping it would lead toward the main highway, but it led out into a wooded pasture. Beyond that he found another road, running up and down the valley, and it soon appeared that he was taking the wrong direction on it, for it was turning toward the location of that city in which he had seen the great Festival.

He began to resign himself to returning to the city. Once there, of course, he could start out on the right road again. But he would like to satisfy his curiosity about some of the things he had read in those little booklets from the pack Haplanke restored to him. He had perused them intensely during the months on the farm. Of course, eventually he would resume his search for the palace of Fantasy.

As he walked along immersed in these thoughts, he failed to notice that the ground underfoot was becoming soft and moist. Then suddenly he was knee-deep in the road, and saw that it was a creek crossing. Swearing at the dark-colored mud, he struggled on to reach the other side of the ford over that he was in it. When he was halfway across the muddy bed, a noise caused him to look upstream. There was a wall of liquid rushing down upon him! On its crest it carried all manner of debris, quills, ribbons, sticks, sponges, telegraph blanks, and, along the very edge, a line of discarded calendar pages.

Then it was over him, engulfing him, trampling his head over heels downstream, and he grasped vainly at the pencil-thin sticks. When at length the crest had left him behind and he could swim in the stuff, he was horrified to find that it was all a deep purple. A purple that clung to him, to his hands, his face, his neck, his very hair. It tended to form a crust, too, so that swimming was difficult. But floating was a little easier, so he floated and let the current carry him along, until he heard the sound of rapids.

He struggled then to reach the banks, but before he could do so, the purple stream accelerated and deluged into a larger one of deep black, the main river that ran down the length of the valley. This liquid was quite thick and clinging and of low specific gravity, so that he had to work very hard to stay afloat. He kicked off his shoes and vainly tried to work free of his pack. Steadily his strength ebbed.

When at last he could swim no longer, and the banks seemed as far away as ever, he lavished a sentimental, "Farewell, Fantasy!" and ceased his struggles.

Immediately his feet found footing in the bed of the shallow black river, and he dismastedly waded to the bank.

A YOUNG FELLOW whom he knew vaguely helped pull him ashore. "We were just sitting here admiring the multicolor maelstrom," he said, indicating a group of companions. "Well, you look like you had really been in it. Got behind those vines and see if you can shake yourself off with the stuff in this tub. Klean, no soap. I'll get some smudgers for you from one of the boys. There's an alcoholic spring and one of hot water. Wash yourself and clothes in both of them."

They were making ready to leave when Fantasite emerged, looking fairly presentable. It appeared that they were headed in the direction of his destination, so he joined them.

For many miles on this side of the river's head was a pale desert of gigantic water-lilies, and beyond them rose a horrible forest. Myriads of locusts hidden in the woods chorused a chirping, "Gosh, for, Boy-o-Boy ---", and the frogs who dwelt among the lilies' roots rolled back a response, "Mouth of the beast. Mouth of the beast."

A girl of the party turned away from this scene, delicately holding her nose. Fantasite looked at her and almost shouted, for she seemed too very image of Fantasy. Her name was unknown, he learned, and he made it a point to walk beside her along the highway.

Talking with her was an experience second only to his long-ago conversation with Fantasy herself. It helped rearrange his thoughts, clarify his aspirations, and reinforce his zeal. But she was not quite the Fantasy he sought. In too many ways, she was simply not interested in what he was interested in. But that part of the journey passed very easily for the young pilgrim.

The land began to heave under the pill of the mountains, the highway leading up toward a plateau. Due to wartime conditions, someone said, the road became rougher and rutted. Along here, the unknown girl had the misfortune to twist her ankle, but insisted that the others go on while she abode in a hostel, hoping to join them later.

III

ON THE UPLAND the members of the group fanned out in various directions, and Fantasite with the other youths made their way to a town crag-shadowed, where the plain drove farthest into the main mountain mass.

It was while they were procuring equipment for the ascent that it happened. The constable approached the three in a second-hand store and asked, "Which of you is called Fantasite? ... Young man, I place you under arrest, on a warrant sworn out by Mr. Palmer. You are accused of robbery and breach of contract. Come along."

When he heard who his accuser was, Fantasite's heart sick. At the police station she confronted him, gesticulating wildly. "That's him! He ran off when he owed me service for his board and keep. And he stole an ox. Is this gratitude, you scoundrel, for all the nice original dishes I gave you? Trying to run away from the farm. Don't you know you're a farm boy, and the farm boy belongs on the farm! Come back with me!"

"Take it easy, Madam," spoke the constable. "If he has committed robbery, as you say, it is a crime against the state, and he must either be imprisoned or otherwise punished by the state."

The trial passed in a sick haze for Fantasite. It was their word against his, and when he tried to plead that he had higher things to seek than farm work, the solid burghers on the jury glared at him disapprovingly. The most he was able to accomplish was to avoid being placed in Mr. Palmer's custody. But he was sentenced to eighteen months in jail.

HOW DID HE pass that time? He asked for and received drawing materials, and in order to avoid going mad, set down on paper in various forms the visual expression of his dreams, imaginings, and longings. Someone chanced to see them, and the agent of a man referred to as "H" came to see him, offering money if he would produce work of this sort, suitably modified for use in advertizing. But when Fantasite learned that the offered contract would bind him to stay on the plateau for five years to do this work, he was not tempted.

"He might let you have three months off to go hunting in the mountains, provided you come back at the end of that time."

"No," answered Fantasite; "I can't be committed on my future."

"I have published some of your drawings without your consent," said the agent, "with certain changes, of course. I hope you don't mind. They were voted best in a rather large exhibition, and I am pleased to present you with this special of honor." Fantasite thanked him, and was quite

dazzled by the mirbo. I was then puzzled from the cunningly worked metal surface, but he did not offer to reopen the question of a contract.

The agent played his trump card. "We have influence in this place, you know. If you were to sign up as one of our leading artists, the jailers would hardly be justified in holding you for the remainder of your sentence. And believe me, that second half will be longer than the first half seemed."

"Go away!" cried Fantasite, afraid that he might yield. The agent left. Fantasite did not see him again.

OTHER VISITORS HAD HIM in those dismal months. One was a minister, who took a peep about on the floor of the cell and began to harangue him.

"Why is your mind so set upon the maiden Fantasy?" he demanded. "Is she not of this world?"

"She is not," Fantasite answered.

"Then how can you reach her while your mind is preoccupied with worldly things? Do you not know that these prison walls contain you only because your befuddled mind accepts their reality, as you accept the reality of all this sinful world?"

"That--doesn't seem to make sense,"

Fantasite said slowly.

"Hark you yet again. All visible things, my friend, are but as cardboard masks, gross manifestations they of that world of spirit we all strive to attain. Why should our lives so far fall short our reach, were it not that our whole manner of thinking is wrong?" Fantasite knitted his brows. Again; there must be something in this. The priest went on, "Then see: If man would strike, strike through the crack! How can the prisoner get outside, except by reaching through the wall? Your imprisonment is but an attitude, man; if you will, you can walk free from it in a day. But it will take longer than that to train yourself to disregard these temporal things. You must perform certain exercises that I shall assign to you, sleep only on the bare floor, and eat nothing but soup until you can dispense with such support altogether."

As the man began to describe to him the extensive glories that awaited him when he became One with the cosmic All, Fantasite noticed that the fellow's neck, just under the round, loose-fitting collar, was very dark. But he became caught up in the curvilinear picture the man painted, till he no more wanted it true that he believed it was true, and his ideal of Fantasy merged into the greater glory and became lost.

He tried the regimen prescribed, but soon became sick on the soup diet without meaning to gain any control over his environment, and presently asked the jailer not to admit the minister any more.

ANOTHER VISITOR was a fellow a little older than himself, whom he had met a time or two before on the journey.

"If I were you," he said, proffering a smoke, "as soon as I got out of here I'd head back to a good town and learn to like it. You might start thinking now which place you've been in that you liked best. This stuff about beautiful dunes up in the hills is a lot of eye-wash. I was looking for one of the Jesse sisters, and half a dozen people in this country told me I could see her place from the top of the Mount of Vision. Well, I climbed up at Sophistication by mistake, but it stands at least as high as Vision, and must have been harder to climb. Got to the top and there wasn't a thing to be seen beyond. I'd been played for a sucker."

"What do you intend to do now?" asked Fantasite.

and said, "I don't know. There's smooth dunes anywhere you go, but it's not so easy to make a living some places. I think some of the towns up here on the dunes are as good a bet as any, but I'd like to go down into the big valley again, just to tell the towns what a lot of baloney they've been eating."

"You don't think any of them would really burn back, do you?" said Fantasite.

"Their tough luck if they don't. It's nothing to me. Well, I don't care one way or the other about anything. Only I'm telling you, Fantasite, after all the hard knocks

you've had on this wild goose chase, you oughta wise up and take it easy before you're so old it won't make any difference."

"Yes, but look, Disillusion; I've had some rough times carrying out this quest, but I've been a good deal happier while on it than the times when I gave it up for a while. You can't claim you're happy."

it over. See you back in Panopolis, maybe." "Well, at least I ain't in jail. Think

ON THE DAY in early spring when he was released, a red-haired girl met Fantasite at the prison door.

"My father has heard of you and your seeking," she said, "and would like to help you. He asks me to present you this marvelous honey-jar. It is an inexhaustible source of honey and should be helpful to you, though of course you should not draw on it to the exclusion of everything else." Fantasite thanked her kindly. She went on, "My father would like to do much more toward equipping you for your perilous climb up the mountains, if you will be good enuf to visit him."

They rode several miles up a narrow side canyon, and came to a place where a huge castle frowned over its moats. The Baron received the youth in his office, and almost immediately came to the point. "I am an entrepreneur, sir. When a discovery with moneymaking possibilities is bro't to my attention, I do what is necessary to start production. Now, a means has been found, and the formula is in my hands, to manufacture an opiate soothing syrup out of particular types of wood pulp. Unfortunately, the only--well, say the best--sources of that type of pulp in this country any longer appear to be in uncut timber scattered over the upper slopes of Mt Imagination, and until now we have not been able to get anyone to climb to the places where such forests are to be found. I propose to give you a description of the raw materials we are looking for, and you will note the locations of sources of supply that you may come across and the most practicable routes by which men and machinery can reach them. In return, I shall furnish you with the very best accessories for mountaineering, including such topographical maps as are available, and of course pay you a satisfactory salary."

"That would mean that I'd be obliged to return to report to you, wouldn't it? I'm sorry, sir, and I thank you for your kindness, but I cannot so commit myself. Moreover, to be honest, I am not in sympathy with your project."

The great man's brow darkened. "So?" he said, and flipped a lever on his desk. "Bernarrd! apostate! Take our friend to the tower room and let him consider the matter till suppertime. Then, if he is still undecided, see what you can do to persuade him. I warn you, young man, it is accept my offer, and ascend the mountain as my agent, or by the nine planets, you shall not ascend it at all!"

DUSK WAS FALLING outside the barred window when the gorillas returned. Not even bothering to ask whether Fantasite had reconsidered, they wheeled in their equipment. A porcelain tray was laden with tartuous styles, dull denouements, pointless observations, blunt interpolations, and jagged vers. On a wheeled base of its own was a creaky plot, operated by a foot pedal. But the operations commenced with Bernarrd administering a dose of sickening confections, and instantly sealing the victim's mouth with chewing-gum. Apostate laid aside a conversation he had been winding, and opening an official case, drew out a nickel-plated augur. "Let's just infect him with some plain old boredom and leave him for a while. In the morning he'll be crying for soothing syrup. Unmanacle him and have him roll up his sleeve."

As Bernarrd did so, a hubbub broke out beneath the tower. Apostate swung the barred casement open and leaned out. "I can see the standard," he said. "Or a radical sign and billet in chief gules."

"Lord Campbell!" said Bernarrd in dismay. "He has not bothered us since he captured that nation. What pests are we supposed to man? Come on!"

"Close the door, stupid," muttered apostate, following him out and carefully locking the door behind himself.

LEFT ALONE, FANTASITE staggered to the window, drawing in gulps of air until the sickness induced by the confections subsided. It was a drop of fifty feet to the moat, but after

a shuddering glance at the instruments of torture, he knew that he must risk it. He hoisted himself into the window opening, took a deep breath, and jumped feet first.

He brot up hard against the bottom of the window, and shot to the surface. Treading water, he caught his breath and took in the scene on the bank. Around the drawbridge there was a sound of clashing weapons and the sharp odor of ozone. Lights in many hands reflected on the water, but Fantasite was in comparative darkness. He dragged his sodden figure onto the bank behind a hedgerow that ran to the nearby woods.

AS he reached them, a voice said, "You were about to leave your honey-jar," and the red-haired girl held it out to him. He mumbled his thanks.

"So you are going on with your search for Fantasy? Then I wish you success. And perhaps if you do not find her, you will return here?"

"Perhaps," Fantasite said, but he didn't mean it.

"Goodbye, then. You're a fool, Fantasite, but there should be more like you. I would that I had a lover half so faithful."

SEVERAL THOUSAND FEET UP it was still winter, but as the more difficult climbing slowed his progress into weeks, the snow began to melt, and the sun shone warm thru the rarefied atmosphere.

One day at noon the youth reached a temporary impasse on a rock ledge, and paused to make a lunch from his honey-jar and the supplies in his pack. As he was gathering some snow to melt, there came an earsplitting hiss, and five hundred pounds of insatiable hunger launched itself upon him.

It was a winged dragon of the species Aragretia artis, which lairs on the craggy heights of Mount Sophistication and preys on the hardy climbers of that and nearby mountains. Fantasite leaped back against the rock wall, so that the beast was forced to veer away, but the flat end of its tail ripped his stout wool shirt from elbow to shoulder.

At its next pass, from a new angle, he dropped behind a boulder and looked around for something to throw. The only thing was his honey-jar. As the dragon banked to dive again, he hurled the jar, striking the leathery underside of its slim body. For a moment it dropped downward, but then spread its great bat-like wings again and soared up, to alight on the far end of the ledge. From there it came toward the adventurer on its atrophied legs, and then, with a scream of rage, launched itself upon him.

The human rose to meet it, and dodging the vicious bill, caught it around the short neck. Together they tumbled over the edge, and plummeted downward for a second. Then the reptile spread its wings and a warm current bore them upward.

The monster was trying to strike at him with its slender beak, but Fantasite with one hand caught at the horny crest which projected behind its head, and with the weight of his body and pack on that, the dragon could not bend its beak down to reach him. Then it began to tear at him with the claws that projected from the leading edge of the wings, but left off for a moment as they began to lose altitude again.

Free to act for a moment, Fantasite put both hands on the horny crest and tugged it down toward him. The monster screamed once again and went into a long glide; then there came a cracking sound from its neck, the wings went lax, and spinning half over, the two fell into the top of a tree.

FANTASITE BATHERD HIS WOUNDS at a spring which bubbled out among a field of alpine clover, bandaged the most serious, and replaced his ruined shirt with one from his pack. Then he climbed a rocky outcropping to survey his surroundings.

A gravel road curved across the knoll and disappeared behind a line of poplars where innumerable birds of passage sang. As he followed it for a quarter of a mile, it rose gently toward a hill that stood above the surrounding heights.

Here was a great house of a style unclassifiable but flawlessly tasteful and quietly magnificent. It was surrounded by a high hedge of boxwood, and as

the young man reached the gateway, he could see an expanse of lawn before the house, bounded on one side by formal gardens and on the other by a grape arbor set in clover ahum with bees.

He went up the dusty drive to the front door and rang. The butler who answered was a rather round little Englishman with thinning hair and a scraggly mustache.

"I seek the maiden Fantasy," said the traveler. "Can you tell me where she is?"

The butler's abstracted expression brightened into a smile of recognition. "Oh, yes," he said, "she's been expecting you. You'll find her in the arbor."