

SWAYLONE'S ISLAND

Written By

David Lindsay

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A Voyage to Arcturus, volume 15

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Swaylone's Island

When he awoke, the day was not so bright, and he guessed it was late afternoon. Polecrab and his wife were both on their feet, and another meal of fish had been cooked and was waiting for him.

"Is it decided who is to go with me?" he asked, before sitting down.

"I go," said Gleameil.

"Do you agree, Polecrab?"

The fisherman growled a little in his throat and motioned to the others to take their seats. He took a mouthful before answering.

"Something strong is attracting her, and I can't hold her back. I don't think I shall see you again, wife, but the lads are now nearly old enough to fend for themselves."

"Don't take dejected views," replied Gleameil sternly. She was not eating. "I shall come back, and make amends to you. It's only for a night."

Maskull gazed from one to the other in perplexity. "Let me go alone. I would be sorry if anything happened."

Gleameil shook her head.

"Don't regard this as a woman's caprice," she said. "Even if you hadn't passed this way, I would have heard that music soon. I have a hunger for it."

"Haven't you any such feeling, Polecrab?"

"No. A woman is a noble and sensitive creature, and there are attractions in nature too subtle for males. Take her with you, since she is set on it. Maybe she's right. Perhaps Earthrid's music will answer your questions, and hers too."

"What are your questions, Gleameil?"

The woman shed a strange smile. "You may be sure that a question which requires music for an answer can't be put into words."

"If you are not back by the morning," remarked her husband, "I will know you are dead."

The meal was finished in a constrained silence. Polecrab wiped his mouth, and produced a seashell from a kind of pocket.

"Will you say goodbye to the boys? Shall I call them?" She considered a moment.

"Yes—yes, I must see them."

He put the shell to his mouth, and blew; a loud, mournful noise passed through the air.

A few minutes later there was a sound of scurrying footsteps, and the boys were seen emerging from the forest. Maskull looked with curiosity at the first children he had seen on Tormance. The oldest boy was carrying the youngest on his back, while the third trotted some distance behind. The child was let down, and all the three formed a semicircle in front of Maskull, standing staring up at him with wide-open eyes. Polecrab looked on stolidly, but Gleameil glanced away from them, with proudly raised head and a baffling expression.

Maskull put the ages of the boys at about nine, seven, and five years, respectively; but he was calculating according to Earth time. The eldest was tall, slim, but strongly built. He, like his brothers, was naked, and his skin from top to toe was ulfire-colored. His facial muscles indicated a wild and daring nature, and his eyes were like green fires. The second showed promise of being a broad, powerful man. His head was large and heavy, and drooped. His face and skin were reddish. His eyes were almost too sombre and penetrating for a child's.

"That one," said Polecrab, pinching the boy's ear, "may perhaps grow up to be a second Broodviol."

"Who was that?" demanded the boy, bending his head forward to hear the answer.

"A big, old man, of marvellous wisdom. He became wise by making up his mind never to ask questions, but to find things out for himself."

"If I had not asked this question, I should not have known about him."

"That would not have mattered," replied the father.

The youngest child was paler and slighter than his brothers. His face was mostly tranquil and expressionless, but it had this peculiarity about it, that every few minutes, without any apparent cause, it would wrinkle up and look perplexed. At these times his eyes, which were of a tawny gold, seemed to contain secrets difficult to associate with one of his age.

"He puzzles me," said Polecrab. "He has a soul like sap, and he's interested in nothing. He may turn out to be the most remarkable of the bunch."

Maskull took the child in one hand, and lifted him as high as his head. He took a good look at him, and set him down again. The boy never changed countenance.

"What do you make of him?" asked the fisherman.

"It's on the tip of my tongue to say, but it just escapes me. Let me drink again, and then I shall have it."

"Go and drink, then."

Maskull strode over to the tree, drank, and returned. "In ages to come," he said, speaking deliberately, "he will be a grand and awful tradition. A seer possibly, or even a divinity. Watch over him well."

The eldest boy looked scornful. "I want to be none of those things. I would like to be like that big fellow." And he pointed his finger at Maskull.

He laughed, and showed his white teeth through his beard. "Thanks for the compliments old warrior!" he said.

"He's great and brawny," continued the boy, "and can hold his own with other men. Can you hold me up with one arm, as you did that child?"

Maskull complied.

"That is being a man!" exclaimed the boy. "Enough!" said Polecrab impatiently. "I called you lads here to say goodbye to your mother. She is going away with this man. I think she may not return, but we don't know."

The second boy's face became suddenly inflamed. "Is she going of her own choice?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied the father.

"Then she is bad." He brought the words out with such force and emphasis that they sounded like the crack of a whip.

The old man cuffed him twice. "Is it your mother you are speaking of?"

The boy stood his ground, without change of expression, but said nothing.

The youngest child spoke, for the first time. "My mother will not come back, but she will die dancing."

Polecrab and his wife looked at one another.

"Where are you going to, Mother?" asked the eldest lad.

Gleameil bent down, and kissed him. "To the Island."

"Well then, if you don't come back by tomorrow morning, I will go and look for you."

Maskull grew more and more uneasy in his mind. "This seems to me to be a man's journey," he said. "I think it would be better for you not to come, Gleameil."

"I am not to be dissuaded," she replied.

He stroked his beard in perplexity. "Is it time to start?"

"It wants four hours to sunset, and we shall need all that."

Maskull sighed. "I'll go to the mouth of the creek, and wait there for you and the raft. You will wish to make your farewells, Gleameil."

He then clasped Polecrab by the hand. "Adieu, fisherman!"

"You have repaid me well for my answers," said the old man gruffly. "But it's not your fault, and in Shaping's world the worst things happen."

The eldest boy came close to Maskull, and frowned at him. "Farewell, big man!" he said. "But guard my mother well, as well as you are well able to, or I shall follow you, and kill you."

Maskull walked slowly along the creek bank till he came to the bend. The glorious sunshine, and the sparkling, brilliant sea then met his eyes again; and all melancholy was swept out of his mind. He continued as far as the seashore, and issuing out of the shadows of the forest, strolled on to the sands, and sat down in the full sunlight. The radiance of Alppain had long since disappeared. He drank in the hot, invigorating wind, listened to the hissing waves, and stared over the coloured sea with its pinnacles and currents, at Swaylone's Island.

"What music can that be, which tears a wife and mother away from all she loves the most?" he meditated. "It sounds unholy. Will it tell me what I want to know? Can it?"

In a little while he became aware of a movement behind him, and, turning his head, he saw the raft floating along the creek, toward the open sea. Polecrab was standing upright, propelling it with a rude pole. He passed by Maskull, without looking at him, or making any salutation, and proceeded out to sea.

While he was wondering at this strange behaviour, Gleameil and the boys came in sight, walking along the bank of the inlet. The eldest-born was holding her hand, and talking; and the other two were behind. She was calm and smiling, but seemed abstracted.

"What is your husband doing with the raft?" asked Maskull.

"He's putting it in position and we shall wade out and join it," she answered, in her low-toned voice.

"But how shall we make the island, without oars or sails?"

"Don't you see that current running away from land? See, he is approaching it. That will take us straight there."

"But how can you get back?"

"There is a way; but we need not think of that today."

"Why shouldn't I come too?" demanded the eldest boy.

"Because the raft won't carry three. Maskull is a heavy man."

"It doesn't matter," said the boy. "I know where there is wood for another raft. As soon as you have gone, I shall set to work."

Polecrab had by this time manoeuvred his flimsy craft to the position he desired, within a few yards of the current, which at that point made a sharp bend from the east. He shouted out some words to his wife and Maskull. Gleameil kissed her children convulsively, and broke down a little. The eldest boy bit his lip till it bled, and tears glistened in his eyes; but the younger children stared wide-eyed, and displayed no emotion.

Gleameil now walked into the sea, followed by Maskull. The water covered first their ankles, then their knees, but when it came as high as their waists, they were close on the raft. Polecrab let himself down into the water, and assisted his wife to climb over the side. When she was up, she bent down and kissed

him. No words were exchanged. Maskull scrambled up on to the front part of the raft. The woman sat cross-legged in the stern, and seized the pole.

Polecrab shoved them off toward the current, while she worked her pole until they had got within its power. The raft immediately began to travel swiftly away from land, with a smooth, swaying motion.

The boys waved from the shore. Gleameil responded; but Maskull turned his back squarely to land, and gazed ahead. Polecrab was wading back to the shore.

For upward of an hour Maskull did not change his position by an inch. No sound was heard but the splashing of the strange waves all around them, and the streamlike gurgle of the current, which threaded its way smoothly through the tossing, tumultuous sea. From their pathway of safety, the beautiful dangers surrounding them were an exhilarating experience. The air was fresh and clean, and the heat from Branchspell, now low in the west, was at last endurable. The riot of sea colors had long since banished all sadness and anxiety from his heart. Yet he felt such a grudge against the woman for selfishly forsaking those who should have been dear to her that he could not bring himself to begin a conversation.

But when, over the now enlarged shape of the dark island, he caught sight of a long chain of lofty, distant mountains, glowing salmon-pink in the evening sunlight, he felt constrained to break the silence by inquiring what they were.

“It is Lichstorm,” said Gleameil.

Maskull asked no questions about it; but in turning to address her, his eyes had rested on the rapidly receding Wombflash Forest, and he continued to stare at that. They had travelled about eight miles, and now he could better estimate the enormous height of the trees. Overtopping them, far away, he saw Sant; and he fancied, but was not quite sure, that he could distinguish Disscourn as well.

“Now that we are alone in a strange place,” said Gleameil, averting her head, and looking down over the side of the raft into the water, “tell me what you thought of Polecrab.”

Maskull paused before answering. “He seemed to me like a mountain wrapped in cloud. You see the lower buttresses, and think that is all. But then, high up, far above the clouds, you suddenly catch sight of more mountain—and even then it is not the top.”

“You read character well, and have great perception,” remarked Gleameil quietly. “Now say what I am.”

“In place of a human heart, you have a wild harp, and that’s all I know about you.”

“What was that you said to my husband about two worlds?”

“You heard.”

“Yes, I heard. And I also am conscious of two worlds. My husband and boys are real to me, and I love them fondly. But there is another world for me, as there is for you, Maskull, and it makes my real world appear all false and vulgar.”

“Perhaps we are seeking the same thing. But can it be right to satisfy our self-nature at the expense of other people?”

“No, it’s not right. It is wrong, and base. But in that other world these words have no meaning.”

There was a silence.

“It’s useless to discuss such topics,” said Maskull. “The choice is now out of our hands, and we must go where we are taken. What I would rather speak about is what awaits us on the island.”

“I am ignorant—except that we shall find Earthrid there.”

“Who is Earthrid, and why is it called Swaylone’s Island?”

“They say Earthrid came from Threal, but I know nothing else about him. As for Swaylone, if you like I will tell you his legend.”

“If you please,” said Maskull.

“In a far-back age,” began Gleameil, “when the seas were hot, and clouds hung heavily over the earth, and life was rich with transformations, Swaylone came to this island, on which men had never before set foot, and began to play his music—the first music in Tormance. Nightly, when the moon shone, people used to gather on this shore behind us, and listen to the faint, sweet strains floating from over the sea. One night, Shaping (whom you call Crystalman) was passing this way in company with Krag. They listened a while to the music, and Shaping said ‘Have you heard more beautiful sounds? This is my world and my music.’ Krag stamped with his foot, and laughed. ‘You must do better than that, if I am to admire it. Let us pass over, and see this bungler at work.’ Shaping consented, and they passed over to the island. Swaylone was not able to see their presence. Shaping stood behind him, and breathed thoughts into his soul, so that his music became ten times lovelier, and people listening on that shore went mad with sick delight. ‘Can any strains be nobler?’ demanded Shaping. Krag grinned and said, ‘You are naturally effeminate. Now let me try.’ Then he stood behind Swaylone, and shot ugly discords fast into his head. His instrument was so cracked, that never since has it played right. From that time forth Swaylone could utter only distorted music; yet it called to folk more than the other sort. Many men crossed over to the island during his lifetime, to listen to the amazing tones, but none could endure them; all died. After Swaylone’s death, another musician took up the tale; and so the light has passed down from torch to torch, till now Earthrid bears it.”

“An interesting legend,” commented Maskull. “But who is Krag?”

“They say that when the world was born, Krag was born with it—a spirit compounded of those vestiges of Muspel which Shaping did not know how to transform. Thereafter nothing has gone right with the world, for he dogs Shaping’s footsteps everywhere, and whatever the latter does, he undoes. To love he joins death; to sex, shame; to intellect, madness; to virtue, cruelty; and to fair exteriors, bloody entrails. These are Krag’s actions, so the lovers of the world call him ‘devil.’ They don’t understand, Maskull, that without him the world would lose its beauty.”

“Krag and beauty!” exclaimed he, with a cynical smile.

“Even so. That same beauty which you and I are now voyaging to discover. That beauty for whose sake I am renouncing husband, children, and happiness.... Did you imagine beauty to be pleasant?”

“Surely.”

“That pleasant beauty is an insipid compound of Shaping. To see beauty in its terrible purity, you must tear away the pleasure from it.”

“Do you say I am going to seek beauty, Gleameil? Such an idea is far from my mind.”

She did not respond to his remark. After waiting for a few minutes, to hear if she would speak again, he turned his back on her once more. There was no more talk until they reached the island.

The air had grown chill and damp by the time they approached its shores. Branchspell was on the point of touching the sea. The Island appeared to be some three or four miles in length. There were first of all broad sands, then low, dark cliffs, and behind these a wilderness of insignificant, swelling hills, entirely devoid of vegetation. The current bore them to within a hundred yards of the coast, when it made a sharp angle, and proceeded to skirt the length of the land.

Gleameil jumped overboard, and began swimming to shore. Maskull followed her example, and the raft, abandoned, was rapidly borne away by the current. They soon touched ground, and were able to wade the rest of the way. By the time they reached dry land, the sun had set.

Gleameil made straight for the hills; and Maskull, after casting a single glance at the low, dim outline of the Wombflash Forest, followed her. The cliffs were soon scrambled up. Then the ascent was gentle and easy, while the rich, dry, brown mould was good to walk upon.

A little way off, on their left, something white was shining.

“You need not go to it,” said the woman. “It can be nothing else than one of those skeletons Polecrab talked about. And look—there is another one over there!”

“This brings it home!” remarked Maskull, smiling.

“There is nothing comical in having died for beauty,” said Gleameil, bending her brows at him.

And when in the course of their walk he saw the innumerable human bones, from gleaming white to dirty yellow, lying scattered about, as if it were a naked graveyard among the hills, he agreed with her, and fell into a sombre mood.

It was still light when they reached the highest point, and could set eyes on the other side. The sea to the north of the island was in no way different from that which they had crossed, but its lively colors were fast becoming invisible.

“That is Matterplay,” said the woman, pointing her finger toward some low land on the horizon, which seemed to be even farther off than Wombflash.

“I wonder how Digrung passed over,” meditated Maskull.

Not far away, in a hollow enclosed by a circle of little hills, they saw a small, circular lake, not more than half a mile in diameter. The sunset colors of the sky were reflected in its waters.

“That must be Irontick,” remarked Gleameil.

“What is that?”

“I have heard that it’s the instrument Earthrid plays on.”

“We are getting close,” responded he. “Let us go and investigate.”

When they drew nearer, they observed that a man was reclining on the farther side, in an attitude of sleep.

“If that’s not the man himself, who can it be?” said Maskull. “Let’s get across the water, if it will bear us; it will save time.”

He now assumed the lead, and took running strides down the slope which bounded the lake on that side. Gleameil followed him with greater dignity, keeping her eyes fixed on the recumbent man as if fascinated. When Maskull reached the water’s edge, he tried it with one foot, to discover if it would carry his weight. Something unusual in its appearance led him to have doubts. It was a tranquil, dark, and beautifully reflecting sheet of water; it resembled a mirror of liquid metal. Finding that it would bear him, and that nothing happened, he placed his second foot on its surface. Instantly he sustained a violent shock throughout his body, as from a powerful electric current; and he was hurled in a tumbled heap back on to the bank.

He picked himself up, brushed the dirt off his person, and started walking around the lake. Gleameil joined him, and they completed the half circuit together. They came to the man, and Maskull prodded him with his foot. He woke up, and blinked at them.

His face was pale, weak, and vacant-looking, and had a disagreeable expression. There were thin sprouts of black hair on his chin and head. On his forehead, in place of a third eye, he possessed a perfectly circular organ, with elaborate convolutions, like an ear. He had an unpleasant smell. He appeared to be of young middle age.

“Wake up, man,” said Maskull sharply, “and tell us if you are Earthrid.”

“What time is it?” counterquestioned the man. “Does it want long to moonrise?”

Without appearing to care about an answer, he sat up, and turning away from them, began to scoop up the loose soil with his hand, and to eat it halfheartedly.

“Now, how can you eat that filth?” demanded Maskull, in disgust.

“Don’t be angry, Maskull,” said Gleameil, laying hold of his arm, and flushing a little. “It is Earthrid—the man who is to help us.”

“He has not said so.”

“I am Earthrid,” said the other, in his weak and muffled voice, which, however, suddenly struck Maskull as being autocratic. “What do you want here? Or rather, you had better get away as quickly as you can, for it will be too late when Teargeld rises.”

“You need not explain,” exclaimed Maskull. “We know your reputation, and we have come to hear your music. But what’s that organ for on your forehead?”

Earthrid glared, and smiled, and glared again.

“That is for rhythm, which is what changes noise into music. Don’t stand and argue, but go away. It is no pleasure to me to people the island with corpses. They corrupt the air, and do nothing else.”

Darkness now crept swiftly on over the landscape.

“You are rather bigmouthed,” said Maskull coolly. “But after we have heard you play, perhaps I shall adventure a tune myself.”

“You? Are you a musician, then? Do you even know what music is?”

A flame danced in Gleameil’s eyes.

“Maskull thinks music reposes in the instrument,” she said in her intense way. “But it is in the soul of the Master.”

“Yes,” said Earthrid, “but that is not all. I will tell you what it is. In Threal, where I was born and brought up, we learn the mystery of the Three in nature. This world, which lies extended before us, has three directions. Length is the line which shuts off what is, from what is not. Breadth is the surface which shows us in what manner one thing of what-is, lives with another thing. Depth is the path which leads from what-is, to our own body. In music it is not otherwise. Tone is existence, without which nothing at all can be. Symmetry and Numbers are the manner in which tones exist, one with another. Emotion is the movement of our soul toward the wonderful world that is being created. Now, men when they make music are accustomed to build beautiful tones, because of the delight they cause. Therefore their music world is based on pleasure; its symmetry is regular and charming, its emotion is sweet and lovely.... But my music is founded on painful tones; and thus its symmetry is wild, and difficult to discover; its emotion is bitter and terrible.”

“If I had not anticipated its being original, I would not have come here,” said Maskull. “Still, explain—why can’t harsh tones have simple symmetry of form? And why must they necessarily cause more profound emotions in us who listen?”

“Pleasures may harmonise. Pains must clash; and in the order of their clashing lies the symmetry. The emotions follow the music, which is rough and earnest.”

“You may call it music,” remarked Maskull thoughtfully, “but to me it bears a closer resemblance to actual life.”

“If Shaping’s plans had gone straight, life would have been like that other sort of music. He who seeks can find traces of that intention in the world of nature. But as it has turned out, real life resembles my music and mine is the true music.”

“Shall we see living shapes?”

“I don’t know what my mood will be,” returned Earthrid. “But when I have finished, you shall adventure your tune, and produce whatever shapes you please—unless, indeed, the tune is out of your own big body.”

“The shocks you are preparing may kill us,” said Gleameil, in a low, taut voice, “but we shall die, seeing *beauty*.”

Earthrid looked at her with a dignified expression.

“Neither you, nor any other person, can endure the thoughts which I put into my music. Still, you must have it your own way. It needed a woman to call it ‘beauty.’ But if this is beauty, what is ugliness?”

“That I can tell you, Master,” replied Gleameil, smiling at him. “Ugliness is old, stale life, while yours every night issues fresh from the womb of nature.”

Earthrid stared at her, without response. “Teargeld is rising,” he said at last. “And now you shall see—though not for long.”

As the words left his mouth, the full moon peeped over the hills in the dark eastern sky. They watched it in silence, and soon it was wholly up. It was larger than the moon of Earth, and seemed nearer. Its shadowy parts stood out in just as strong relief, but somehow it did not give Maskull the impression of being a dead world. Branchspell shone on the whole of it, but Alppain only on a part. The broad crescent that reflected Branchspell’s rays alone was white and brilliant; but the part that was illuminated by both suns shone with a greenish radiance that had almost solar power, and yet was cold and cheerless. On gazing at that combined light, he felt the same sense of disintegration that the afterglow of Alppain had always caused in him; but now the feeling was not physical, but merely aesthetic. The moon did not appear romantic to him, but disturbing and mystical.

Earthrid rose, and stood quietly for a minute. In the bright moonlight, his face seemed to have undergone a change. It lost its loose, weak, disagreeable look, and acquired a sort of crafty grandeur. He clapped his hands together meditatively two or three times, and walked up and down. The others stood together, watching him.

Then he sat down by the side of the lake, and, leaning on his side, placed his right hand, open palm downward, on the ground, at the same time stretching out his right leg, so that the foot was in contact with the water.

While Maskull was in the act of staring at him and at the lake, he felt a stabbing sensation right through his heart, as though he had been pierced by a rapier. He barely recovered himself from falling, and as he did so he saw that a spout had formed on the water, and was now subsiding again. The next moment he was knocked down by a violent blow in the mouth, delivered by an invisible hand. He picked

himself up; and observed that a second spout had formed. No sooner was he on his legs, than a hideous pain hammered away inside his brain, as if caused by a malignant tumour. In his agony, he stumbled and fell again; this time on the arm Krag had wounded. All his other mishaps were forgotten in this one, which half stunned him. It lasted only a moment, and then sudden relief came, and he found that Earthrid's rough music had lost its power over him.

He saw him still stretched in the same position. Spouts were coming thick and fast on the lake, which was full of lively motion. But Gleameil was not on her legs. She was lying on the ground, in a heap, without moving. Her attitude was ugly, and he guessed she was dead. When he reached her, he discovered that she was dead. In what state of mind she had died, he did not know, for her face wore the vulgar Crystalman grin. The whole tragedy had not lasted five minutes.

He went over to Earthrid and dragged him forcibly away from his playing.

"You have been as good as your word, musician," he said. "Gleameil is dead."

Earthrid tried to collect his scattered senses.

"I warned her," he replied, sitting up. "Did I not beg her to go away? But she died very easily. She did not wait for the beauty she spoke about. She heard nothing of the passion, nor even of the rhythm. Neither have you."

Maskull looked down at him in indignation, but said nothing.

"You should not have interrupted me," went on Earthrid. "When I am playing, nothing else is of importance. I might have lost the thread of my ideas. Fortunately, I never forget. I shall start over again."

"If music is to continue, in the presence of the dead, I play next."

The man glanced up quickly.

"That can't be."

"It must be," said Maskull decisively. "I prefer playing to listening. Another reason is that you will have every night, but I have only tonight."

Earthrid clenched and unclenched his fist, and began to turn pale. "With your recklessness, you are likely to kill us both. Irontick belongs to me, and until you have learned how to play, you would only break the instrument."

"Well, then, I will break it; but I am going to try."

The musician jumped to his feet and confronted him. "Do you intend to take it from me by violence?"

"Keep calm! You will have the same choice that you offered us. I shall give you time to go away somewhere."

"How will that serve me, if you spoil my lake? You don't understand what you are doing."

“Go, or stay!” responded Maskull. “I give you till the water gets smooth again. After that, I begin playing.”

Earthrid kept swallowing. He glanced at the lake and back to Maskull.

“Do you swear it?”

“How long that will take, you know better than I; but till then you are safe.”

Earthrid cast him a look of malice, hesitated for an instant, and then moved away, and started to climb the nearest hill. Halfway up he glanced over his shoulder apprehensively, as if to see what was happening. In another minute or so, he had disappeared over the crest, travelling in the direction of the shore that faced Matterplay.

Later, when the water was once more tranquil, Maskull sat down by its edge, in imitation of Earthrid’s attitude. He knew neither how to set about producing his music, nor what would come of it. But audacious projects entered his brain and he willed to create physical shapes—and, above all, one shape, that of Surtur.

Before putting his foot to the water, he turned things over a little in his mind.

He said, “What *themes* are in common music, *shapes* are in this music. The composer does not find his theme by picking out single notes; but the whole theme flashes into his mind by inspiration. So it must be with shapes. When I start playing, if I am worth anything, the undivided ideas will pass from my unconscious mind to this lake, and then, reflected back in the dimensions of reality, I shall be for the first time made acquainted with them. So it must be.”

The instant his foot touched the water, he felt his thoughts flowing from him. He did not know what they were, but the mere act of flowing created a sensation of joyful mastery. With this was curiosity to learn what they would prove to be. Spouts formed on the lake in increasing numbers, but he experienced no pain. His thoughts, which he knew to be music, did not issue from him in a steady, unbroken stream, but in great, rough gushes, succeeding intervals of quiescence. When these gushes came, the whole lake broke out in an eruption of spouts.

He realised that the ideas passing from him did not arise in his intellect, but had their source in the fathomless depths of his will. He could not decide what character they should have, but he was able to force them out, or retard them, by the exercise of his volition.

At first nothing changed around him. Then the moon grew dimmer, and a strange, new radiance began to illuminate the landscape. It increased so imperceptibly that it was some time before he recognised it as the Muspel-light which he had seen in the Wombflash Forest. He could not give it a colour, or a name, but it filled him with a sort of stern and sacred awe. He called up the resources of his powerful will. The spouts thickened like a forest, and many of them were twenty feet high. Teargeld looked faint and pale; the radiance became intense; but it cast no shadows. The wind got up, but where Maskull was sitting, it was calm. Shortly afterward it began to shriek and whistle, like a full gale. He saw no shapes, and redoubled his efforts.

His ideas were now rushing out onto the lake so furiously that his whole soul was possessed by exhilaration and defiance. But still he did not know their nature. A huge spout shot up and at the same moment the hills began to crack and break. Great masses of loose soil were erupted from their bowels, and in the next period of quietness, he saw that the landscape had altered. Still the mysterious light intensified. The moon disappeared entirely. The noise of the unseen tempest was terrifying, but Maskull played heroically on, trying to urge out ideas which would take shape. The hillsides were cleft with chasms. The water escaping from the tops of the spouts, swamped the land; but where he was, it was dry.

The radiance grew terrible. It was everywhere, but Maskull fancied that it was far brighter in one particular quarter. He thought that it was becoming localised, preparatory to contracting into a solid form. He strained and strained....

Immediately afterward the bottom of the lake subsided. Its waters fell through, and his instrument was broken.

The Muspel-light vanished. The moon shone out again, but Maskull could not see it. After that unearthly shining, he seemed to himself to be in total blackness. The screaming wind ceased; there was a dead silence. His thoughts finished flowing toward the lake, and his foot no longer touched water, but hung in space.

He was too stunned by the suddenness of the change to either think or feel. While he was still lying dazed, a vast explosion occurred in the newly opened depths beneath the lakebed. The water in its descent had met fire. Maskull was lifted bodily in the air, many yards high, and came down heavily. He lost consciousness....

When he came to his senses again, he saw everything. Teargeld was gleaming brilliantly. He was lying by the side of the old lake, but it was now a crater, to the bottom of which his eyes could not penetrate. The hills encircling it were torn, as if by heavy gunfire. A few thunderclouds were floating in the air at no great height, from which branched lightning descended to the earth incessantly, accompanied by alarming and singular crashes.

He got on his legs, and tested his actions. Finding that he was uninjured, he first of all viewed the crater at closer quarters, and then started to walk painfully toward the northern shore.

When he had attained the crest above the lake, the landscape sloped gently down for two miles to the sea. Everywhere he passed through traces of his rough work. The country was carved into scarps, grooves, channels, and craters. He arrived at the line of low cliffs overlooking the beach, and found that these also were partly broken down by landslips. He got down onto the sand and stood looking over the moonlit, agitated sea, wondering how he could contrive to escape from this island of failure.

Then he saw Earthrid's body, lying quite close to him. It was on its back. Both legs had been violently torn off and he could not see them anywhere. Earthrid's teeth were buried in the flesh of his right forearm, indicating that the man had died in unreasoning physical agony. The skin gleamed green in the

moonlight, but it was stained by darker discolourations, which were wounds. The sand about him was dyed by the pool of blood which had long since filtered through.

Maskull left the corpse in dismay, and walked a long way along the sweet-smelling shore. Sitting down on a rock, he waited for daybreak.