

# **The Power and the Glory**

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## CHAPTER I

### *Transmutation*

Carrying the coffee-pot, the Belgian shuffled out of the room. The door thumped behind him. Miller met Slade's inquiring stare and shrugged.

"So he's crazy," Miller said.

Slade drew down the corners of his thin mouth. "Maybe he is. But I've got other sources of information, remember. I'm sure there's—something—up on Peak Seven Hundred. Something plenty valuable. You're going to find it for me." His teeth clicked on the last word.

"Am I?" Miller said sourly.

"Suit yourself. Anytime you feel like it you can go back to the States." There was a threat in the way he said it.

Miller said, "Sure. And then you send a few telegrams . . . It was a sweet little frame you fixed up on me. A murder rap—"

"Well," Slade interrupted, "*that* happened to be a frame. I've got to protect myself, though, in case you ever want to turn State's evidence."

"I've done your dirty work for ten years," Miller growled. "It's too late now to try crossing you up. But we're both guilty of one particular murder, Slade. A guy named Miller who was an honest lawyer, ten years ago. I feel sorry for the poor sucker."

Slade's strong, implacable face turned away from him.

"The man with the gun has the advantage. Up on Peak Seven Hundred there's the biggest gun in the world—I think. Something's sending out terrific power-radiations. I'm no scientist, but I've got men working for me who are. If I can get that—weapon—from the Peak, I can write my own ticket."

Miller looked at him curiously. He had to admit Slade's strength, his powerful will. Head of a slightly criminal and completely unscrupulous political empire for a decade now, Slade was growing restive, reaching out for new worlds to conquer.

Word of this power-source on the peak in Alaska had sounded fantastic even back in the States but it seemed to fascinate Slade, who could afford to indulge his whims. And he could afford to trust Miller—to a certain extent. Miller was in Slade's hands and knew it.

They both looked up as the Belgian came back into the room, carrying a fresh bottle of whiskey. Van Hornung was drunk and well aware of his own drunkenness. He peered at them from under the huge fur cap he wore even indoors.

*"Could man be drunk forever with liquor, love and fights—"* he murmured, hooking out a chair with his foot. "Ah well, it doesn't matter now. Have another drink, gentlemen."

Miller glanced at Slade, then leaned forward across the table.

"About Peak Seven Hundred, now," he said. "I wish you'd—"

The Belgian slapped a fat hand on the table. "You ask me about Seven Hundred. Very well, then—listen. I would not tell you

before—I did not wish you to die. Now I am drunker and, I think, wiser. It does not matter whether a man lives or dies.

“For twenty years I have been neither alive nor dead. I have not thought nor felt emotion nor lived like a man. I have eaten and drunk and tried to forget. If you wish to go to the Peak I’ll tell you the way. It’s all quite futile, you see.”

He drank. Miller and Slade exchanged glances in silence.

“If you go,” Van Hornung said, “you will leave your soul behind you—as I did. We are not the dominant race, you see. We try to achieve the summits but we forget that there may already be dwellers on the peaks. Oh yes, I will tell you the way to the Peak if you like. But if you live you will not care about anything any more.”

Miller glanced again at Slade, who gestured impatiently.

“I’ll take a chance on that,” Miller said to the Belgian. “Tell me the way.”

In the dim twilight of the arctic noon Miller followed his Inuit guides up the snowy foothills toward Seven Hundred. For many days they had traveled, deeper and deeper into this dry, sub-zero silence, muffled in snow. The guides were nervous. They knew their arctic gods, animistic, watchful, resented intrusion into sacred areas like Peak Seven Hundred. In their fur-hooded Esquimaux faces oriental eyes watched Miller mistrustfully.

He was carrying his gun now. Two of the Innuits had deserted already, in the depths of the long nights. These two remained and hated him, and went on only because their fear of his gun was greater—so far—than their fear of the gods on Seven Hundred.

The Peak lifted great sheer cliffs almost overhead. There was no visible way of scaling it. But the Innuits were hurrying ahead as if they had already sighted a clearly marked trail. Miller quickened his steps, a vague uneasiness beginning to stir in his mind.

Then the foremost Esquimau dropped to his knees and began to scabble in the snow. Miller shouted, hearing his own voice come back thin and hollow from the answering peaks. But when he reached the two, one of them looked up over his furclad shoulder and smiled a grim smile. In his native tongue he spoke one of the strange compound words that can convey a whole sentence.

“*Ariartokasuaromarotit-tog*,” he said. “Thou too wilt soon go quickly away.” There was threat and warning and satisfaction in the way he said it. His fur mitten patted something in the snow.

Miller bent to look. An iridescent pathway lay there, curving up around a boulder and out of sight, rough crystal surfaces that caught the light with red and blue shadows. Here in the white, silent world of the high peaks it looked very beautiful and strange. Miller knelt and ran a gloved hand over it, feeling even through the leather a slight tingling. . . .

“*Erubescite!*” he murmured to himself, and smiled. It meant copper, perhaps gold. And it was an old vein. The color spoke of long exposure. There was nothing strange about finding a vein of erubescite in the mountains—the interpenetrating cubes twinned on an octahedral plane were common enough in certain mining regions. Still, the regularity of the thing was odd. And that curious tingling. . . .

It looked like a path.

The Innuits were watching him expectantly. Moving with caution, Miller stepped forward and set his foot on the path. It was uneven, difficult to balance on. He took two or three steps along the iridescent purple slope, and then. . . .

And then he was moving smoothly upward, involuntarily, irresistibly. There was a strange feeling in his feet and up the long muscles at the back of his legs. And the mountain was sliding away below him. Peaks, snow-slopes, fur-clad men all slipped quietly off down the mountainside, while at Miller's feet a curving ribbon of iridescence lengthened away.

"I'm dreaming!" was his first thought. And his head spun with the strange new motion so that he staggered—and could not fall. That tingling up his legs was more than a nervous reaction, it was a permeation of the tissues.

"Transmutation!" he thought wildly, and clutched in desperation at the slipping fabric of his own reason. "The road's moving," he told himself as calmly as he could. "I'm fixed to it somehow. Transmutation? Why did I think of transmutation? I can't move my feet or legs—they feel like stone—like the substance of the road."

The changing of one element into another—lead into gold, flesh into stone . . . The Innuits had known. Far away he could see the diminishing dots that were his guides slide around a curve and vanish. He gestured helplessly, finding even his arms growing heavy, as if that strange atomic transmutation were spreading higher and higher through his body.

Powerless, one with the sliding path, he surrendered himself without a struggle to that mounting glide. Something stronger than himself had him in a grip that seemed purposeful. He could only

wait and . . . it was growing difficult to think. Perhaps the change was reaching to his brain by now. He couldn't tell.

He only knew that for a timeless period thereafter he did not think any more about anything. . . .

Thin laughter echoed through his mind. A man's voice said, "But I am bored, Tsi. Besides, he won't be hurt—much. Or if he is, what does it matter?"

Miller was floating in a dark void. There was a strangeness about the voice he could not analyze. He heard a woman answer and in her tone was a curious likeness to the man's.

"Don't, Brann," she said. "You can find other—amusements."

The high laughter came again. "But he's still new. It should be interesting."

"Brann, please let him go."

"Be silent, Tsi. I'm master here. Is he awake yet?"

A pause. "No, not yet. Not for a while yet."

"I can wait." The man sighed. "I've preparations to make, anyhow. Let's go, Tsi."

There was a long, long pause. The voices were still.

Miller knew he was floating in nothingness. He tried to move and could not. Inertia still gripped his body but his brain was free and functioning with a clarity that surprised him. It was almost as if that strange transmutation had changed his very brain-tissues to something new and marvelous.



“Transmutation,” he thought. “Lead into gold—flesh into stone—that’s what I was thinking about when—when I stopped thinking. When that sort of change happens, it means the nuclear charge in the atoms of one substance or the other has to change too. The tingling when I touched the road—was that when it happened?”

But he paused there, knowing there was no answer. For when had a man ever before felt the shifting from flesh to crystal take place in his own body?

If it had happened that way, then it must have been a force like the coulomb forces themselves that welded him into one with the moving road—the all but irresistible forces that hold the electrons in their orbits and rivet all creation into a whole.

And now—what?

“There are two methods of transmutation,” he told himself clearly, lying there in the dark and groping for some answer to the thing that was happening to him.

“Rationalize it,” his mind seemed to say, “or you’ll go mad with sheer uncertainty. Reason it out from what you know. A chemical element is determined by the number of electrons around the nucleus—change that and you change the element. But the nucleus, in turn, determines by its charge the number of electrons it can control. If the nuclear charge is changed, then this—this crystalline state—is permanent.

“But if it isn’t, then that must mean there’s constant bombardment that knocks off or adds electrons to whatever touches that road. The change wouldn’t be permanent because the original charge of the nucleus remains constant. After awhile the extra electrons

would be dropped, or others captured to restore the balance, and I'd be normal again. That must be the way of it," he told himself, "because Van Hornung came this way. And he went back again—normal. Or was he really normal?"

The question echoed without answer in his brain. Miller lay quiet a moment longer and then began to try once more to stir his inert body. This time, a very little, he felt muscles move. . . .

What seemed a long while later, he found he could open his eyes. Very cautiously he looked around.

## CHAPTER II

### *Tsi*

He was alone. He lay on something hard and flat. A dome of crystal arched overhead, not very high, so that he seemed in effect to lie in a box of crystal—a coffin, he thought grimly, and sat up with brittle care. His muscles felt as stiff as if the substance of the iridescent roadway still permeated his flesh.

The dome seemed to have strange properties, for all he saw through it was curiously distorted and colored with such richness it almost hurt the eyes to gaze upon what lay beyond.

He saw columns of golden trees upon which leaves moved and glittered in constantly changing prisms of light. Something like smoke seemed to wreath slowly among the trees, colored incredibly. Seen through the dome about him the color of the smoke was nameless. No man ever saw that hue before nor gave a name to it.

The slab on which he sat was the iridescent purple of the road. If it had carried him here, he saw no obvious way in which it could have left him lying on the crystal coffin. Yet, clearly, this was the end of the moving roadway and, clearly too, the forces which had welded him to it were gone now.

The unstable atoms created in the grip of that strange force had shaken off their abnormality and reverted to their original form. He was himself again but stiff, dizzy and not sure whether he had dreamed the voices. If he had, it was a nightmare. He shivered a

little, remembering the thin, inhuman laughter and its promise of dreadful things.

He got up, very cautiously, looking around. As nearly as he could tell through the distorting crystal there was no one near him. The coffin stood in a grove of the golden trees and, except for the mist and the twinkling leaves, nothing moved. He put out a tentative hand to push the crystal up.

His hand went through it. There was a tinkling like high music, ineffably sweet, and the crystal flew into glittering fragments that fell to the ground in a second rain of sound. The beauty of it for a moment was almost pain. He had never heard such music before. It was almost more beautiful than any human being should be allowed to hear, he thought confusedly. There are sensations so keen they can put too great a strain upon human nerves.

Then he stood there unprotected by the dome and looked around him at the trees and the mist and saw that the dome had made no difference. These incredible colors were no distortions—they were real. He took a tentative step and found the grass underfoot so soft that even through his shoe-soles he could feel its caress.

The very air was exquisitely cool and hushed, like the air of a summer dawn, almost liquid in its translucence. Through it the winking of the prism-leaves was so lovely to look at that he turned his eyes away, unable to endure the sight for more than a moment.

This was hallucination. “I’m still somewhere back there in the snow,” he thought. “Delirium—that’s it. I’m imagining this.” But if it were a dream, then Van Hornung had known it too, and men do not dream identical dreams. The Belgian had warned him.

He shook his shoulders impatiently. Even with all this before him he could not quite bring himself to believe Van Hornung's story. There was a quality of dream about this landscape, as if all he saw were not in reality what it seemed, as if this grass of ineffable softness were—and he knew it was—only crusted snow, as if those cliffs he could glimpse among the trees were really the bare crags of Peak Seven Hundred, and everything else delirium. He felt uneasily that he was really lying somewhere asleep in the snow, and must wake soon, before he froze.

That high, thin laughter rang suddenly through the air. In spite of himself Miller felt his heart lurch and he whirled to face the sound with a feeling of cold terror congealing him. It was odd how frightening the careless voice had been, talking impersonally of its pleasures.

A little group of men and women was coming toward him through the trees. He could not guess which of them had laughed the familiar laughter. They wore brilliantly colored garments of a subtle cut that hung like a toga or a sari, with a wonderful sophistication of line. The colors were incredible.

Miller blinked dazedly, trying in vain to find names for those shimmering hues that seemed to combine known colors into utterly unknown gradations and to draw from the range of colors above and below the spectrum as we see it.

A woman said, "Oh, he's awake," and a man laughed pleasantly and said, "Look how surprised he is!" All of them smiled and turned bright, amused faces to Miller.

He said something—he never remembered what—and stopped in sheer shock at the harsh dissonance of his own voice. It was like an

ugly discord tearing through smooth, lilting arpeggios of harmony. The faces of the others went blank briefly, as though they had concentrated on something else to avoid hearing the sound. The woman Miller had first noticed lifted her hand.

“Wait,” she said. “Listen to me, for a moment. There is no need to speak—*aloud*.” A faint distaste was in her tone. Her . . . tone? That could not be right. No voice was ever so sweetly musical, so gently harmonious.

Miller looked at her. Her face was a small pale triangle, lovely and elfin and strange, with enormous violet eyes and piled masses of hair that seemed to flow in winding strands through one another. Each strand was of a different pastel hue, dusty green or pale amethyst or the yellow of sunshine on a hazy morning. It was so in keeping, somehow, that Miller felt no surprise. That bizarre coiffure fitted perfectly with the woman’s face.

He opened his mouth again, but the woman—it shocked him a little, and he wondered that it did not shock him even more—was suddenly beside him. A split-second before she had been ten feet away.

“You have much to learn,” she said. “First, though—remember not to speak. It isn’t necessary. Simply frame your thoughts. There’s a little trick to it. No—keep your mouth closed. Think. Think your question.”

Her lips had moved slightly, but merely for emphasis. And surely normal vocal cords could not have been capable of that unearthly sweetness and evenness of tone, with its amazing variations and nuances. Miller thought, “Telepathy. It must be telepathy.”

They waited, watching him inquiringly.

The woman said, silently, “Think—*to me*. Frame the thought more carefully. The concepts must be rounded, complete. Later you may use abstracts but you can’t do that yet. All I can read is a cloudiness. . . .”

Miller thought carefully, word by word, “Is this telepathy?”

“Still cloudiness,” she said. “But it’s clearer now. You were never used to clear thinking. Yes, it is telepathy.”

“But how can I—where am I? What is this place?”

She smiled at him, and laughter moved through the group. “More slowly. Remember, you have just been born.”

“Just—what?”

And thoughts seemed to fly past him like small bright insects, grazing the edges of his consciousness. A half-mocking, friendly thought from one of the men, a casual comment from another.

*Brann, Miller thought, remembering. What about Brann? Where is he?*

There was dead silence. He had never felt such stillness before. It was of the mind, not physical. But he felt communication, super-sensory, rapid and articulate, between the others. Abruptly the rainbow-haired woman took his arm, while the others began to drift off through the prism-leaves and the golden trees.

She pulled him gently away under the tinkling foliage, through the drifts of colored mists. Brushing violet fog before them with her free hand, she said, “We would rather not mention Brann here, if

we can avoid it. To speak of him sometimes—brings him. And Brann is in a dangerous mood today.”

Miller looked at her with a frown of concentration. There was so much to ask. In that strange mental tongue that was already coming more easily to him, he said, “I don’t understand any of this. But I know your voice. Or rather, your—I’m not sure what you’d call it.”

“The mental voice, you mean? Yes, you learn to recognize them. It’s easy to imitate an audible voice but the mental one can’t be imitated. It’s part of the person. So you remember hearing my thoughts before? I thought you were asleep.”

“You’re Tsi.”

“Yes,” she said and pushed aside a tinkling screen of the prisms. Before them stood a low rampart of light—or water. Four feet high, it ran like liquid but it glowed like light. Beyond it was blue sky and a sheer, dizzying drop to meadows hundreds of feet below. The whole scene was almost blindingly vivid, every lovely detail standing out sharp and clear and dazzling.

He said, “I don’t understand. There are legends about people up here, but not about—this. This vividness. Who are you? What is this place?”

Tsi smiled at him. There was warmth and compassion in the smile, and she said gently, “This is what your race had once, and lost. We’re very old, but we’ve kept—” Abruptly she paused, her eyes brightening suddenly with a look of terror.

She said. “Hush!” and in the mental command there was a wave of darkness and silence that seemed to blanket his mind. For no



reason his heart began to pound with nervous dread. They stood there motionless for an instant, mind locked with mind in a stillness that was more than absence of sound—it was absence of thought. But through the silence Miller caught just the faintest echo of that thin, tittering laugh he had heard before, instinct with cold, merciless amusement.

The prism leaves sang around them with little musical tinklings. From the sunlit void stretching far below bird-song rippled now and then with a sweetness that was almost painful to hear. Then Tsi's mind relaxed its grip upon Miller's and she sighed softly.

“It's all right now. For a moment I thought Brann . . . but no, he's gone again.”

“Who is Brann?” Miller demanded.

“The lord of this castle. A very strange creature—very terrible when his whims are thwarted. Brann is—he cares for nothing very much. He lives only for pleasure and, because he's lived so long and exhausted so many pleasures, the devices he uses now are not very—well, not very pleasant for anyone but Brann. There was a warp in him before his birth, you see. He's not quite—not quite of our breed.”

“He's from the outside world? Human?” As he said it Miller knew certainly that the woman before him was not human, not as he understood the term.

But Tsi shook her head. “Oh, no. He was born here. He's of our breed. But not of our norm. A little above in many ways, a little below in others. *Your* race—” there was faint distaste and pity in the thought, but she let it die there, unelaborated.

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