Shifting Seas

Stanley G. Weinbaum

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It developed later that Ted Welling was one of the very few eye-witnesses of the catastrophe, or rather, that among the million and a half eye-witnesses, he was among the half dozen that survived. At the time, he was completely unaware of the extent of the disaster, although it looked bad enough to him in all truth!

He was in a Colquist gyro, just north of the spot where Lake Nicaragua drains its brown overflow into the San Juan, and was bound for Managua, seventy-five miles north and west across the great inland sea. Below him, quite audible above the muffled whir of his motor, sounded the intermittent clicking of his tripanoramic camera, adjusted delicately to his speed so that its pictures could be assembled into a beautiful relief map of the terrain over which he passed. That, in fact, was the sole purpose of his flight; he had left San Juan del Norte early that morning to traverse the route of the proposed Nicaragua Canal, flying for the Topographical branch of the U. S. Geological Survey. The United States, of course, had owned the rights to the route since early in the century—a safeguard against any other nation's aspirations to construct a competitor for the Panama Canal.

Now, however, the Nicaragua Canal was actually under consideration. The over-burdened ditch that crossed the Isthmus was groaning under vastly increased traffic, and it became a question of either cutting the vast trench another eighty-five feet to sea-level or opening an alternate passage. The Nicaragua route was feasible enough; there was the San Juan emptying from the great lake into the Atlantic, and there was Lake Managua a dozen miles or so from the Pacific. It was simply a matter of choice, and Ted Welling, of the Topographical Service of the Geological Survey, was doing his part to aid the choice.

At precisely 10:40 it happened. Ted was gazing idly through a faintly misty morning toward Ometepec, its cone of a peak plumed

by dusky smoke. A hundred miles away, across both Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua, the fiery mountain was easily visible from his altitude. All week, he knew, it had been rumbling and smoking, but now, as he watched it, it burst like a mighty Roman candle.

There was a flash of white fire not less brilliant than the sun. There was a column of smoke with a red core that spouted upward like a fountain and then mushroomed out. There was a moment of utter silence in which the camera clicked methodically, and then there was a roar as if the very roof of Hell had blown away to let out the bellows of the damned!

Ted had one amazed thought—the sound had followed too quickly on the eruption! It should have taken minutes to reach him at that distance—and then his thoughts were forcibly diverted as the Colquist tossed and skittered like a leaf in a hurricane. He caught an astonished glimpse of the terrain below, of Lake Nicaragua heaving and boiling as if it were the seas that lash through the Straits of Magellan instead of a body of landlocked fresh water. On the shore to the east a colossal wave was breaking, and there in a banana grove frightened figures were scampering away. And then, exactly as if by magic, a white mist condensed about him, shutting out all view of the world below.

He fought grimly for altitude. He had had three thousand feet, but now, tossed in this wild ocean of fog, of up-drafts and down-drafts, of pockets and humps, he had no idea at all of his position. His altimeter needle quivered and jumped in the changing pressure, his compass spun, and he had not the vaguest conception of the direction of the ground. So he struggled as best he could, listening anxiously to the changing whine of his blades as strain grew and lessened. And below, deep as thunder, came intermittent rumblings that were, unless he imagined it, accompanied by the flash of jagged fires.

Suddenly he was out of it. He burst abruptly into clear air, and for a horrible instant it seemed to him that he was actually flying inverted. Apparently below him was the white sea of mist, and above was what looked at first glance like dark ground, but a moment's scrutiny revealed it as a world-blanketing canopy of smoke or dust, through which the sun shone with a fantastic blue light. He had heard of blue suns, he recalled; they were one of the rarer phenomena of volcanic eruptions.

His altimeter showed ten thousand. The vast plain of mist heaved in gigantic ridges like rolling waves, and he fought upward away from it. At twenty thousand the air was steadier, but still infinitely above was the sullen ceiling of smoke. Ted leveled out, turning at random north-east, and relaxed.

"Whew!" he breathed. "What—what happened?"

He couldn't land, of course, in that impenetrable fog. He flew doggedly north and cast, because there was an airport at Bluefields, if this heaving sea of white didn't blanket it.

But it did. He had still half a tank of fuel, and, he bored grimly north. Far away was a pillar of fire, and beyond it to the right, another and a third. The first, of course, was Ometepec, but what were the others? Fuego and Tajumulco? It seemed impossible.

Three hours later the fog was still below him, and the grim roof of smoke was dropping as if to crush him between. He was going to have to land soon; even now he must have spanned Nicaragua and be somewhere over Honduras. With a sort of desperate calm he slanted down toward the fog and plunged in. He expected to crash; curiously, the only thing he really regretted was dying without a chance to say goodbye to Kay Lovell, who was far off in Washington with her father, old Sir Joshua Lovell, Ambassador from Great Britain.

When the needle read two hundred, he leveled off—and then, like a train bursting out of a tunnel, he came clear again! But under him was wild and raging ocean, whose waves seemed almost to graze the ship. He spun along at a low level, wondering savagely how he could possibly have wandered out to sea. It must, he supposed, be the gulf of Honduras.

He turned west. Within five minutes he had raised a storm-lashed coast, and then—miracle of all miracles!—a town! And a landing field, He pancaked over it, let his vanes idle, and dropped as vertically as he could in that volley of gusty winds.

It was Belize in British Honduras. He recognized the port even before the attendants had reached him.

"A Yankee!" yelled the first. "Ain't that Yankee luck for you!"

Ted grinned. "I needed it. What happened?"

"The roof over this part of Hell blew off. That's all."

"Yeah. I saw that much. I was over it."

"Then you know more'n any of us. Radio's dead and there ain't no bloomin' telegraph at all."

It began to rain suddenly, a fierce, pattering rain with drops as big as marbles. The men broke for the shelter of a hangar, where Ted's information, meager as it was, was avidly seized upon, for sensational news is rare below the Tropic of Cancer. But none of them yet realized just how sensational it was.

It was three days before Ted, and the rest of the world as well, began to understand in part what had happened. This was after hours of effort at Belize had finally raised Havana on the beam, and

Ted had reported through to old Asa Gaunt, his chief at Washington. He had been agreeably surprised by the promptness of the reply ordering him instantly to the Capital; that meant a taste of the pleasant life that Washington reserved for young departmentals, and most of all, it meant a glimpse of Kay Lovell after two months of letter-writing. So he had flown the Colquist gayly across Yucatan Channel, left it at Havana, and was now comfortably settled in a huge Caribbean plane bound for Washington, boring steadily north through a queerly misty mid-October morning.

At the moment, however, his thoughts were not of Kay. He was reading a grim newspaper account of the catastrophe, and wondering what thousand-to-one shot had brought him unscathed through the very midst of it. For the disaster overshadowed into insignificance such little disturbances as the Yellow River flood in China, the eruption of Krakatoa, the holocaust of Mount Pelee, or even the great Japanese earthquake of 1923, or any other terrible visitation ever inflicted on a civilized race.

For the Ring of Fire, that vast volcanic circle that surrounds the Pacific Ocean, perhaps the last unhealed scars of the birththroes of the Moon, had burst into flame. Aniakchak in Alaska had blown its top away, Fujiyama had vomited lava, on the Atlantic side La Soufriere and the terrible Pelee had awakened again.

But these were minor. It was at the two volcanic foci, in Java and Central America, that the fire-mountains had really shown their powers. What had happened in Java was still a mystery, but on the Isthmus—that was already too plain. From Mosquito Bay to the Rio Coco, there was—ocean! Half of Panama, seven-eighths of Nicaragua—and as for Costa Rica, that country was as if it had never been. The Canal was a wreck, but Ted grinned a wry grin at the thought that it was now as unnecessary as a pyramid. North and South America had been cut adrift, and the Isthmus, the land that had once known Atlantis, had gone to join it.

In Washington Ted reported at once to Asa Gaunt. That dry Texan questioned him closely concerning his experience, grunted disgustedly at the paucity of information, and then ordered him tersely to attend a meeting at his office in the evening. There remained a full afternoon to devote to Kay, and Ted lost little time in so devoting it.

He didn't see her alone. Washington, like the rest of the world, was full of excitement because of the earthquake, but in Washington more than elsewhere the talk was less of the million and a half deaths and more largely of the other consequences. After all, the bulk of the deaths had been among the natives, and it was a sort of remote tragedy, like the perishing of so many Chinese. It affected only those who had friends or relatives in the stricken region, and these were few in number.

But at Kay's home Ted encountered an excited group arguing physical results. Obviously, the removal of the bottleneck of the Canal strengthened the naval power of the United States enormously. No need now to guard the vulnerable Canal so intensively. The whole fleet could stream abreast through the four hundred mile gap left by the subsidence. Of course the country would lose the revenues of the toll-charges, but that was balanced by the cessation of the expense of fortifying and guarding.

Ted fumed until he managed a few moments of greeting with Kay alone. Once that was concluded to his satisfaction, he joined the discussion as eagerly as the rest. But no one even considered the one factor in the whole catastrophe that could change the entire history of the world.

At the evening meeting Ted stared around him in surprise. He recognized all those present, but the reasons for their presence were obscure. Of course there was Asa Gaunt, head of the Geological Survey, and of course there was Golsborough, Secretary of the Interior, because the Survey was one of his departments. But what was Maxwell, joint Secretary of War and the Navy, doing there? And why was silent John Parish, Secretary of State, frowning down at his shoes in the corner?

Asa Gaunt cleared his throat and began. "Do any of you like eels?" he asked soberly.

There was a murmur. "Why, I do," said Golsborough, who had once been Consul at Venice. "What about it?"

"This—that you'd better buy some and eat 'em tomorrow. There won't be any more eels."

"No more eels?"

"No more eels. You see, eels breed in the Sargasso Sea, and there won't be any Sargasso Sea."

"What is this?" growled Maxwell. "I'm a busy man. No more Sargasso Sea, huh!"

"You're likely to be busier soon," said Asa Gaunt dryly. He frowned. "Let me ask one other question. Does anyone here know what spot on the American continent is opposite London, England?"

Golsborough shifted impatiently, "I don't see the trend of this, Asa," he grunted, "but my guess is that New York City and London are nearly in the same latitude. Or maybe New York's a little to the north, since I know its climate is somewhat colder."

"Hah!" said Asa Gaunt. "Any disagreement?"

There was none. "Well," said the head of the Survey, "you're all wrong, then. London is about one thousand miles north of New York. It's in the latitude of southern Labrador!"

"Labrador! That's practically the Arctic!"

Asa Gaunt pulled down a large map on the wall behind him, a Mercator projection of the world.

"Look at it," he said. "New York's in the latitude of Rome, Italy. Washington's opposite Naples. Norfolk's level with Tunis in Africa, and Jacksonville with the Sahara Desert. And gentlemen, these facts lead to the conclusion that next summer is going to see the wildest war in the history of the world!"

Even Ted, who knew his superior well enough to swear to his sanity, could not resist a glance at the faces of the others, and met their eyes with full understanding of the suspicion in them.

Maxwell cleared his throat. "Of course, of course," he said gruffly. "So there'll be a war and no more eels. That's very easy to follow, but I believe I'll ask you gentlemen to excuse me. You see, I don't care for eels."

"Just a moment more," said Asa Gaunt. He began to speak, and little by little a grim understanding dawned on the four he faced.

Ted remained after the appalled and sobered group had departed. His mind was too chaotic as yet for other occupations, and it was already too late in the evening to find Kay, even had he dared with these oppressive revelations weighing on him.

"Are you sure?" he asked nervously. "Are you quite certain?

"Well, let's go over it again," grunted Asa Gaunt, turning to the map. He swept his hand over the white lines drawn in the Pacific Ocean. "Look here. This is the Equatorial Counter Current, sweeping cast to wash the shores of Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama."

"I know. I've flown over every square mile of that coast."

"Uh." The older man turned to the blue-mapped expanse of the Atlantic. "And here," he resumed, "is the North Equatorial Drift, coming west out of the Atlantic to sweep around Cuba into the Gulf, and to emerge as—the Gulf Stream. It flows at an average speed of three knots per hour, is sixty miles broad, a hundred fathoms deep, and possesses, to start with, an average temperature of 50°. And here—it meets the Labrador Current and turns east to carry warmth to all of Western Europe. That's why England is habitable; that's why southern France is semi-tropical; that's why men can live even in Norway and Sweden. Look at Scandinavia, Ted; it's in the latitude of central Greenland, level with Baffin Bay. Even Eskimos have difficulty scraping a living on Baffin Island."

"I know," said Ted in a voice like a groan. "But are you certain about—the rest of this?"

"See for yourself," growled Asa Gaunt. "The barrier's down now. The Equatorial Counter Current, moving two knots per hour, will sweep right over what used to be Central America and strike the North Equatorial Drift just south of Cuba. Do you see what will

happen—is happening—to the Gulf Stream? Instead of moving north-east along the Atlantic coast, it will flow almost due east, across what used to be the Sargasso Sea. Instead of bathing the shores of Northern Europe, it will strike the Spanish peninsula, just as the current, called the West Wind Drift does now, and instead of veering north it will turn south, along the coast of Africa. At three knots an hour it will take less than three months for the Gulf Stream to deliver its last gallon of warm water to Europe. That brings us to January—and after January, what?"

Ted said nothing.

"Now," resumed Asa Gaunt grimly, "the part of Europe occupied by countries dependent on the Gulf Stream consists of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the British Isles, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and to a lesser extent, several others. Before six months have passed, Ted, you're going to see a realignment of Europe. The Gulf Stream countries are going to be driven together; Germany and France are suddenly going to become bosom friends, and France and Russia, friendly as they are today, are going to be bitter enemies. Do you see why?"

"N-no."

"Because the countries I've named now support over two hundred million inhabitants. Two hundred million, Ted! And without the Gulf Stream, when England and Germany have the climate of Labrador, and France of Newfoundland, and Scandinavia of Baffin Land—how many people can those regions support then? Three or four million, perhaps, and that with difficulty. Where will the others go?"

"Where?"

"I can tell you where they'll try to go. England will try to unload its surplus population on its colonies. India's hopelessly overcrowded, but South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand can absorb some. About twenty-five of its fifty millions, I should estimate, because Canada's a northern country and Australia desert in a vast part of it. France has Northern Africa, already nearly as populous as it can be. The others—well, you guess, Ted."

"I will. Siberia, South America, and—the United States!"

"A good guess. That's why Russia and France will no longer be the best of friends. South America is a skeleton continent, a shell. The interior is unfit for white men, and so—it leaves Siberia and North America. What a war's in the making!"

"It's almost unbelievable!" muttered Ted. "Just when the world seemed to be settling down, too."

"Oh, it's happened before," observed Asa Gaunt. "This isn't the only climatic change that brought on war. It was decreasing rainfall in central Asia that sent the Huns scouring Europe, and probably the Goths and Vandals as well. But it's never happened to two hundred million civilized people before!" He paused. "The newspapers are all shrieking about the million and a half deaths in Central Amer ica. By this time next year they'll have forgotten that a million and a half deaths ever rated a headline!"

"But good Lord!" Ted burst out. "Isn't there anything to be done about it?"

"Sure, sure," said Asa Gaunt. "Go find a nice tame earthquake that will raise back the forty thousand square miles the last one sunk. That's all you have to do, and if you can't do that, Maxwell's suggestion is the next best: build submarines and submarines. They can't invade a country if they can't get to it."

Asa Gaunt was beyond doubt the first man in the world to realize the full implications of the Central American disaster, but he was not very much ahead of the brilliant Sir Phineas Grey of the Royal Society. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on which shore of the Atlantic you call home), Sir Phineas was known to the world of journalism as somewhat of a sensationalist, and his warning was treated by the English and Continental newspapers as on a par with those recurrent predictions of the end of the world. Parliament noticed the warning just once, when Lord Rathmere rose in the Upper House to complain of the unseasonably warm weather and to suggest dryly that the Gulf Stream be turned off a month early this year. But now and again some oceanographer made the inside pages by agreeing with Sir Phineas.

So Christmas approached very quietly, and Ted, happy enough to be stationed in Washington, spent his days in routine topographical work in the office and his evenings, as many as she permitted, with Kay Lovell. And she did permit an increasing number, so that the round of gaiety during the holidays found them on the verge of engagement. They were engaged so far as the two of them were concerned, and only awaited a propitious moment to inform Sir Joshua, whose approval Kay felt, with true English conservatism, was a necessity.

Ted worried often enough about the dark picture Asa Gaunt had drawn, but an oath of secrecy kept him from ever mentioning it to Kay. Once, when she had casually brought up the subject of Sir Phineas Grey and his warning, Ted had stammered some inanity and hastily switched the subject. But with the turn of the year and January, things began to change.

It was on the fourteenth that the first taste of cold struck Europe. London shivered for twenty-four hours in the unheard-of temperature of twenty below zero, and Paris argued and

gesticulated about its grands froids. Then the high pressure area moved eastward and normal temperatures returned.

But not for long. On the twenty-first another zone of frigid temperature came drifting in on the Westerlies, and the English and Continental papers, carefully filed at the Congressional Library, began to betray a note of panic. Ted read the editorial comments avidly: of course Sir Phineas Grey was crazy; of course he was—but just suppose he were right. Just suppose he were. Wasn't it unthinkable that the safety and majesty of Germany (or France or England or Belgium, depending on the particular capital whence the paper came) was subject to the disturbances of a little strip of land seven thousand miles away? Germany (or France, et al) must control its own destiny.

With the third wave of Arctic cold, the tone became openly fearful. Perhaps Sir Phineas was right. What then? What was to be done? There were rumblings and mutterings in Paris and Berlin, and even staid Oslo witnessed a riot, and conservative London as well. Ted began to realize that Asa Gaunt's predictions were founded on keen judgment; the German government made an openly friendly gesture toward France in a delicate border matter, and France reciprocated with an equally indulgent note. Russia protested and was politely ignored; Europe was definitely realigning itself, and in desperate haste.

But America, save for a harassed group in Washington, had only casual interest in the matter. When reports of suffering among the poor began to come during the first week in February, a drive was launched to provide relief funds, but it met with only nominal success. People just weren't interested; a cold winter lacked the dramatic power of a flood, a fire, or an earthquake. But the papers reported in increasing anxiety that the immigration quotas, unapproached for a half a dozen years, were full again; there was the beginning of an exodus from the Gulf Stream countries.

By the second week in February stark panic had gripped Europe, and echoes of it began to penetrate even self-sufficient America. The realignment of the Powers was definite and open now, and Spain, Italy, the Balkans, and Russia found themselves herded together, facing an ominous thunderhead on the north and west. Russia instantly forgot her longstanding quarrel with Japan, and Japan, oddly, was willing enough to forget her own grievances. There was a strange shifting of sympathies; the nations which possessed large and thinly populated areas—Russia, the United States, Mexico, and all of South America—were glaring back at a frantic Europe that awaited only the release of summer to launch a greater invasion than any history had recorded. Attila and his horde of Huns—the Mongol waves that beat down on China—even the vast movements of the white race into North and South America—all these were but minor migrations to that which threatened now. Two hundred million people, backed by colossal fighting power, glaring panic-stricken at the empty places of the world. No one knew where the thunderbolt would strike first, but that it would strike was beyond doubt.

While Europe shivered in the grip of an incredible winter, Ted shivered at the thought of certain personal problems of his own. The frantic world found an echo in his own situation, for here was he, America in miniature, and there was Kay Lovell, a small edition of Britannia. Their sympathies clashed like those of their respective nations.

The time for secrecy was over. Ted faced Kay before the fireplace in her home and stared from her face to the cheery fire, whose brightness merely accentuated his gloom.

"Yeah," he admitted. "I knew about it. I've known it since a couple of days after the Isthmus earthquake."

"Then why didn't you tell me? You should have."

"Couldn't. I swore not to tell."

"It isn't fair!" blazed Kay. "Why should it fall on England? I tell you it sickens me even to think of Merecroft standing there in snow, like some old Norse tower. It was born in Warwickshire, Ted, and so was my father, and his father, and his, and all of us back to the time of William the Conqueror. Do you think it's a pleasant thing to think of my mother's rose garden as barren as—as a tundra?"

"I'm sorry," said Ted gently, "but what can I—or anyone—do about it? I'm just glad you're here on this side of the Atlantic, where you're safe."

"Safe!" she flashed. "Yes, I'm safe, but what about my people? I'm safe because I'm in America, the lucky country, the chosen land! Why did this have to happen to England? The Gulf Stream washes your shores too. Why aren't Americans shivering and

freezing and frightened and hopeless, instead of being warm and comfortable and indifferent? Is that fair?"

"The Gulf Stream," he explained miserably, "doesn't affect our climate so definitely because in the first place we're much farther south than Europe and in the second place our prevailing winds are from the west, just as England's. But our winds blow from the land to the Gulf Stream, and England's from the Gulf Stream to the land."

"But it's not fair! It's not fair!"

"Can I help it, Kay?"

"Oh, I suppose not," she agreed in suddenly weary tones, and then, with a resurgence of anger, "But you people can do something about it! Look here! Listen to this!"

She spied a week-old copy of the London Times, fingered rapidly through it, and turned on Ted. "Listen—just listen! 'And in the name of humanity it is not asking too much to insist that our sister nation open her gates to us. Let us settle the vast areas where now only Indian tribes hunt and buffalo range. We would not be the only ones to gain by such a settlement, for we would bring to the new country a sane, industrious, law-abiding citizenry, no harborers of highwaymen and gangsters—a point well worth considering. We would bring a great new purchasing public for American manufacturers, carrying with us all our portable wealth. And finally, we would provide a host of eager defenders in the war for territory, a war that now seems inevitable. Our language is one with theirs; surely this is the logical solution, especially when one remembers that the state of Texas alone contains land enough to supply two acres to every man, woman, and child on earth!" She paused and stared defiantly at Ted. "Well?"

He snorted. "Indians and buffalo!" he snapped. "Have you seen either one in the United States?"

"No, but—"

"And as for Texas, sure there's enough land there for two acres to everybody in the world, but why didn't your editor mention that two acres won't even support a cow over much of it? The Llano Estacado's nothing but an alkali desert, and there's a scarcity of water in lots of the rest of it. On that argument, you ought to move to Greenland; I'll bet there's land enough there for six acres per person!"

"That may be true, but—"

"And as for a great new purchasing public, your portable wealth is gold and paper money, isn't it? The gold's all right, but what good is a pound if there's no British credit to back it? Your great new public would simply swell the ranks of the unemployed until American industry could absorb them, which might take years! And meanwhile wages would go down to nothing because of an enormous surplus of labor, and food and rent would go skyhigh because of millions of extra stomachs to feed and bodies to shelter."

"All right!" said Kay bleakly. "Argue all you wish. I'll even concede that your arguments are right, but there's one thing I know is wrong, and that's leaving fifty million English people to starve and freeze and suffer in a country that's been moved, as far as climate goes, to the North Pole. Why, you even get excited over a newspaper story about one poor family in an unheated hovel! Then what about a whole nation whose furnace has gone out?"

"What," countered Ted grimly, "about the seven or eight other nations whose furnaces have also gone out?"

"But England deserves priority!" she blazed. "You took your language from us, your literature, your laws, your whole civilization. Why, even now you ought to be nothing but an English colony! That's all you are, if you want the truth!"

"We think differently. Anyway, you know as well as I that the United States can't open the door to one nation and exclude the others. It must be all or none, and that means—none!"

"And that means war," she said bitterly. "Oh, Ted! I can't help the way I feel. I have people over there—aunts, cousins, friends. Do you think I can stand indifferently aside while they're ruined? Although they're ruined already, as far as that goes. Land's already dropped to nothing there. You can't sell it at any price now."

"I know. I'm sorry, Kay, but it's no one's fault. No one's to blame."

"And so no one needs to do anything about it, I suppose. Is that your nice American theory?"

"You know that isn't fair! What can we do?"

"You could let us in! As it is we'll have to fight our way in, and you can't blame us!"

"Kay, no nation and no group of nations can invade this country. Even if our navy were utterly destroyed, bow far from the sea do you think a hostile army could march? It would be Napoleon in Russia all over again; your army marches in and is swallowed up. And where is Europe going to find the food to support an invading army? Do you think it could live on the land as it moved? I tell you no sane nation would try that!"

"No sane nation, perhaps!" she retorted fiercely. "Do you think you're dealing with sane nations?"

He shrugged gloomily.

"They're desperate!" she went on. "I don't blame them. Whatever they do, you've brought it on yourselves. Now you'll be fighting all of Europe, when you could have the British navy on your side. It's stupid. It's worse than stupid; it's selfish!"

"Kay," he said miserably, "I can't argue with you. I know how you feel, and I know it's q bell of a situation. But even if I agreed with everything you've said—which I don't—what could I do about it? I'm not the President and I'm not Congress. Let's drop the argument for this evening, honey; it's just making you unhappy."

"Unhappy! As if I could ever be anything else when everything I value, everything I love, is doomed to be buried under Arctic snow."

"Everything, Kay?" he asked gently. "Haven't you forgotten that there's something for you on this side of the Atlantic as well?"

"I haven't forgotten anything," she said coldly. "I said everything, and I mean it. America! I hate America. Yes, and I hate Americans too!"

"Kay!"

"And what's more," she blazed, "I wouldn't marry an American if he—if he could rebuild the Isthmus! If England's to freeze, I'll freeze with her, and if England's to fight, her enemies are mine!"

She rose suddenly to her feet, deliberately averted her eyes from his troubled face, and stalked out of the room.

Sometimes, during those hectic weeks in February, Ted wormed his way into the Visitor's Gallery in one or the other Congressional house. The outgoing Congress, due to stand for re-election in the fall, was the focal point of the dawning hysteria in the nation, and was battling sensationally through its closing session. Routine matters were ignored, and day after day found both houses considering the unprecedented emergency with a sort of appalled inability to act in any effective unison. Freak bills of all description were read, considered, tabled, reconsidered, put to a second reading, and tabled again. The hard-money boom of a year earlier had swept in a Conservative majority in the off-year elections, but they had no real policy to offer, and the proposals of the minority group of Laborites and Leftists were voted down without substitutes being suggested.

Some of the weirdest bills in all the weird annals of Congress appeared at this time. Ted listened in fascination to the Leftist proposal that each American family adopt two Europeans, splitting its income into thirds; to a suggestion that Continentals be advised to undergo voluntary sterilization, thus restraining the emergency to the time of one generation; to a fantastic paper money scheme of the Senator from the new state of Alaska, that was to provide a magic formula to permit Europe to purchase its livelihood without impoverishing the rest of the world. There were suggestions of outright relief, but the problem of charity to two hundred million people was so obviously staggering that this proposal at least received little attention. But there were certain bills that passed both houses without debate, gaining the votes of Leftists, Laborites, and Conservatives alike; these were the grim appropriations for submarines, super-bombers and interceptors, and aircraft-carriers.

Those were strange, hectic days in Washington. Outwardly there was still the same gay society that gathers like froth around all great capitals, and Ted, of course, being young and decidedly not unattractive, received his full share of invitations. But not even the

least sensitive could have overlooked the dark undercurrents of hysteria that flowed just beneath the surface. There was dancing, there was gay dinner conversation, there was laughter, but beneath all of it was fear. Ted was not the only one to notice that the diplomatic representatives of the Gulf Stream countries were conspicuous by their absence from all affairs save those of such importance that their presence was a matter of policy. And even then, incidents occurred; he was present when the Minister from France stalked angrily from the room because some hostess had betrayed the poor taste of permitting her dance orchestra to play a certain popular number called "The Gulf Stream Blues." Newspapers carefully refrained from mentioning the occurrence, but Washington buzzed with it for days.

Ted looked in vain for Kay. Her father appeared when appearance was necessary, but Ted had not seen the girl since her abrupt dismissal of him, and in reply to his inquiries, Sir Joshua granted only the gruff and double-edged explanation that she was "indisposed." So Ted worried and fumed about her in vain, until he scarcely knew whether his own situation or that of the world was more important. In the last analysis, of course, the two were one and the same.

The world was like a crystal of nitrogen iodide, waiting only the drying-out of summer to explode. Under its frozen surface Europe was seething like Mounts Erebus and Terror that blaze in the ice of Antarctica. Little Hungary had massed its army on the west, beyond doubt to oppose a similar massing on the part of the Anschluss. Of this particular report, Ted heard Maxwell say with an air of relief that it indicated that Germany had turned her face inland; it meant one less potential enemy for America.

But the maritime nations were another story, and especially mighty Britain, whose world-girdling fleet was gathering day by day in the Atlantic. That was a crowded ocean indeed, for on its

westward shore was massed the American battle fleet, built at last to treaty strength, and building far beyond it, while north and south piled every vessel that could raise a pound of steam, bearing those fortunates who could leave their European homes to whatever lands hope called them. Africa and Australia, wherever Europe had colonies, were receiving an unheard of stream of immigrants. But this stream was actually only the merest trickle, composed of those who possessed sufficient liquid wealth to encompass the journey. Untold millions remained chained to their homes, bound by the possession of unsalable lands, or by investments in business, or by sentiment, or by the simple lack of sufficient funds to buy passage for families. And throughout all of the afflicted countries were those who clung stubbornly to hope, who believed even in the grip of that unbelievable winter that the danger would pass, and that things would come right in the end.

Blunt, straightforward little Holland was the first nation to propose openly a wholesale transfer of population. Ted read the note, or at least the version of it given the press on February 21st. In substance it simply repeated the arguments Kay had read from the London paper—the plea to humanity, the affirmation of an honest and industrious citizenry, and the appeal to the friendship that had always existed between the two nations; and the communication closed with a request for an immediate reply because of "the urgency of the situation." And an immediate reply was forthcoming.

This was also given to the press. In suave and very polished diplomatic language it pointed out that the United States could hardly admit nationals of one country while excluding those of others. Under the terms of the National Origins Act, Dutch immigrants would be welcomed to the full extent of their quota. It was even possible that the quota might be increased, but it was not conceivable that it could be removed entirely. The note was in effect a suave, dignified, diplomatic No.

March drifted in on a southwest wind. In the Southern states it brought spring, and in Washington a faint forerunner of balmy weather to come, but to the Gulf Stream countries it brought no release from the Arctic winter that had fallen on them with its icy mantle. Only in the Basque country of Southern France, where vagrant winds slipped at intervals across the Pyrenees with the warm breath of the deflected Stream, was there any sign of the relaxing of that frigid clutch. But that was a promise; April would come, and May—and the world flexed its steel muscles for war.

Everyone knew now that war threatened. After the first few notes and replies, no more were released to the press, but everyone knew that notes, representatives, and communiques were flying between the powers like a flurry of white doves, and everyone knew, at least in Washington, that the tenor of those notes was no longer dove-like. Now they carried brusque demands and blunt refusals.

Ted knew as much of the situation as any alert observer, but no more. He and Asa Gaunt discussed it endlessly, but the dry Texan, having made his predictions and seen them verified, was no longer in the middle of the turmoil, for his bureau had, of course, nothing to do with the affair now. So the Geological Survey staggered on under a woefully reduced appropriation, a handicap shared by every other governmental function that had no direct bearing on defense.

All the American countries, and for that matter, every nation save those in Western Europe, were enjoying a feverish, abnormal, hectic boom. The flight of capital from Europe, and the incessant, avid, frantic cry for food, had created a rush of business, and exports mounted unbelievably. In this emergency, France and the nations under her hegemony, those who had clung so stubbornly to gold ever since the second revaluation of the franc, were now at a marked advantage, since their money would buy more wheat, more

cattle, and more coal. But the paper countries, especially Britain, shivered and froze in stone cottage and draughty manor alike.

On the eleventh of March, that memorable Tuesday when the thermometer touched twenty-eight below in London, Ted reached a decision toward which he had been struggling for six weeks. He was going to swallow his pride and see Kay again. Washington was buzzing with rumors that Sir Joshua was to be recalled, that diplomatic relations with England were to be broken as they had already been broken with France. The entire nation moved about its daily business in an air of tense expectancy, for the break with France meant little in view of that country's negligible sea power, but now, if the colossus of the British navy were to align itself with the French army—

But what troubled Ted was a much more personal problem. If Sir Joshua Lovell were recalled to London, that meant that Kay would accompany him, and once she were caught in the frozen Hell of Europe, he had a panicky feeling that she was lost to him forever. When war broke, as it surely must, there would go his last hope of ever seeing her again. Europe, apparently, was doomed, for it seemed impossible that any successful invasion could be carried on over thousands of miles of ocean, but if he could save the one fragment of Europe that meant everything to him, if he could somehow save Kay Lovell, it was worth the sacrifice of pride or of anything else. So he called one final time on the telephone, received the same response from an unfriendly maid, and then left the almost idle office and drove directly to her home.

The same maid answered his ring. "Miss Lovell is not in," she said coldly. "I told you that when you telephoned."

"I'll wait," returned Ted grimly, and thrust himself through the door. He seated himself stolidly in the hall, glared back at the maid,

and waited. It was no more than five minutes before Kay herself appeared, coming wearily down the steps.

"I wish you'd leave," she said. She was pallid and troubled, and he felt a great surge of sympathy.

"I won't leave."

"What do I have to do to make you go away? I don't want to see you, Ted."

"If you'll talk to me just half an hour, I'll go." She yielded listlessly, leading the way into the living room where a fire still crackled in cheerful irony. "Well?" she asked.

"Kay, do you love me?"

"I—No, I don't!"

"Kay," he persisted gently, "do you love me enough to marry me and stay here where you're safe?"

Tears glistened suddenly in her brown eves. "I hate you," she said. "I hate all of you. You're a nation of murderers. You're like the East Indian Thugs, only they call murder religion and you call it patriotism."

"I won't even argue with you, Kay. I can't blame you for your viewpoint, and I can't blame you for not understanding mine. But—do you love me?"

"All right," she said in sudden weariness. "I do."

"And will you marry me?"

"No. No, I won't marry you, Ted. I'm going back to England."

"Then will you marry me first? I'll let you go back, Kay, but afterwards—if there's any world left after what's coming—I could bring you back here. I'll have to fight for what I believe in, and I won't ask you to stay with me during the time our nations are enemies, but afterwards, Kay—if you're my wife I could bring you here. Don't you see?"

"I see, but—no."

"Why, Kay? You said you loved me."

"I do," she said almost bitterly. "I wish I didn't, because I can't marry you hating your people the way I do. If you were on my side, Ted, I swear I'd marry you tomorrow, or today, or five minutes from now—but as it is, I can't. It just wouldn't be fair."

"You'd not want me to turn traitor," he responded gloomily. "One thing I'm sure of, Kay, is that you couldn't love a traitor." He paused. "Is it goodbye, then?"

"Yes." There were tears in her eyes again. "It isn't public yet, but father has been recalled. Tomorrow he presents his recall to the Secretary of State, and the day after we leave for England. This is goodbye."

"That does mean war!" he muttered. "I've been hoping that in spite of everything—God knows I'm sorry, Kay. I don't blame you for the way you feel. You couldn't feel differently and still be Kay Lovell, but—it's damned hard. It's damned hard!"

She agreed silently. After a moment she said, "Think of my part of it, Ted—going back to a home that's like—well, the Rockefeller Mountains in Antarctica. I tell you, I'd rather it had been England

that sunk into the sea! That would have been easier, much easier than this. If it had sunk until the waves rolled over the very peak of Ben Macduhl—" She broke off.

"The waves are rolling over higher peaks than Ben Macduhl," he responded drearily. "They're—" Suddenly he paused, staring at Kay with his jaw dropping and a wild light in his eyes!

"The Sierra Madre!" he bellowed, in such a roaring voice that the girl shrank away. "The Mother range! The Sierra Madre! The Sierra Madre!"

"Wh-what?" she gasped.

"The Sierra-! Listen to me, Kay! Listen to me! Do you trust me! Will you do something—something for both of us? Us? I mean for the world! Will you?"

"I know you will! Kay, keep your father from presenting his recall! Keep him here another ten days—even another week. Can you?"

"How? How can I?"

"I don't know. Any way at all. Get sick. Get too sick to travel, and beg him not to present his papers until you can leave. Or—or tell him that the United States will make his country an alternate proposal in a few days. That's the truth. I swear that's true, Kay."

"But—but he won't believe me!"

"He's got to! I don't care how you do it, but keep him here! And have him report to the Foreign Office that new developments—vastly important developments—have come up. That's true, Kay."

"True? Then what are they?"

"There isn't time to explain. Will you do what I ask?"

"I'll try!"

"You're—well you're marvelous!" he said huskily. He stared into her tragic brown eyes, kissed her lightly, and rushed away.

Asa Gaunt was scowling down at a map of the dead Salton Sea when Ted dashed unannounced into the office. The rangy Texan looked up with a dry smile at the unceremonious entry.

"I've got it!" yelled Ted.

"A bad case of it," agreed Asa Gaunt. "What's the diagnosis?"

"No, I mean—Say, has the Survey taken soundings over the Isthmus?"

"The Dolphin's been there for weeks," said the older man. "You know you can't map forty thousand square miles of ocean bed during the lunch hour."

"Where," shouted Ted, "are they sounding?"

"Over Pearl Cay Point, Bluefields, Monkey Point, and San Juan del Norte, of course. Naturally they'll sound the places where there were cities first of all."

"Oh, naturally!" said Ted, suppressing his voice to a tense quiver. "And where is the Marlin?"

"Idle at Newport News. We can't operate both of them under this year's budget."

"To hell with the budget!" flared Ted. "Get the Marlin there too, and any other vessel that can carry an electric plumb!"

"Yes, sir—right away, sir," said Asa Gaunt dryly. "When did you relieve Golsborough as Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Welling?"

"I'm sorry," replied Ted. "I'm not giving orders, but I've thought of something. Something that may get all of us out of this mess we're in."

"Indeed? Sounds mildly interesting. Is it another of these international fiat—money schemes?"

"No!" blazed Ted. "It's the Sierra Madre! Don't you see?"

"In words of one syllable, no."

"Then listen! I've flown over every square mile of the sunken territory. I've mapped and photographed it, and I've laid out the geodetics. I know that buried strip of land as well as I know the humps and hollows in my own bed."

"Congratulations, but what of it?"

"This!" snapped Ted. He turned to the wall, pulled down the topographical map of Central America, and began to speak. After a while Asa Gaunt leaned forward in his chair and a queer light gathered in his pale blue eyes.

What follows has been recorded and interpreted in a hundred ways by numberless historians. The story of the Dolphin and the Marlin, sounding in frantic haste the course of the submerged Cordilleras, is in itself romance of the first order. The secret story of diplomacy, the holding of Britain's neutrality so that the lesser sea powers dared not declare war across three thousand miles of ocean, is another romance that will never be told openly. But the most fascinating story of all, the building of the Cordilleran Inter-continental Wall, has been told so often that it needs little comment.

The soundings traced the irregular course of the sunken Sierra Madre mountains. Ted's guess was justified; the peaks of the range were not inaccessibly far below the surface. A route was found where the Equatorial Counter Current swept over them with a depth at no point greater than forty fathoms, and the building of the Wall began on March the 31st, began in frantic haste, for the task utterly dwarfed the digging of the abandoned Canal itself. By the end of September some two hundred miles had been raised to sea-level, a mighty rampart seventy-five feet broad at its narrowest point, and with an extreme height of two hundred and forty feet and an average of ninety.

There was still almost half to be completed when winter swept out of the north over a frightened Europe, but the half that had been built was the critical sector. On one side washed the Counter Current, on the other the Equatorial Drift, bound to join the Gulf Stream in its slow march toward Europe, And the mighty Stream, traced by a hundred oceanographic vessels, veered slowly northward again, and bathed first the shores of France, then of England, and finally of the high northern Scandinavian Peninsula. Winter came drifting in as mildly as of old, and a sigh of relief went up from every nation in the world.

Ostensibly the Cordilleran Inter-continental Wall was constructed by the United States. A good many of the more

chauvinistic newspapers bewailed the appearance of Uncle Sam as a sucker again, paying for the five hundred million dollar project for the benefit of Europe. No one noticed that there was no Congressional appropriation for the purpose, nor has anyone since wondered why the British naval bases on Trinidad, Jamaica, and at Belize have harbored so large a portion of His Majesty's Atlantic Fleet. Nor, for that matter, has anyone inquired why the dead war debts were so suddenly exhumed and settled so cheerfully by the European powers.

A few historians and economists may suspect. The truth is that the Cordilleran Inter-continental Wall has given the United States a world hegemony, in fact almost a world empire. From the south tip of Texas, from Florida, from Puerto Rico, and from the otherwise useless Canal Zone, a thousand American planes could bomb the Wall into ruin. No European nation dares risk that.

Moreover, no nation in the world, not even in the orient where the Gulf Stream has no climatic influence, dares threaten war on America. If Japan, for instance, should so much as speak a hostile word, the whole military might of Europe would turn against her. Europe simply cannot risk an attack on the Wall, and certainly the first effort of a nation at war with the United States would be to force a passage through the Wall.

In effect the United States can command the armies of Europe with a few bombing planes, though not even the most ardent pacifists have yet suggested that experiment. But such are the results of the barrier officially known as the Cordilleran Intercontinental Wall, but called by every newspaper after its originator, the Welling Wall.

It was mid-summer before Ted had time enough to consider marriage and a honeymoon. He and Kay spent the latter on the Caribbean, cruising that treacherous sea in a sturdy fifty-foot sloop lent for the occasion by Asa Gaunt and the Geological Survey. They spent a good share of the time watching the great dredges and construction vessels working desperately at the task of adding millions of cubic yards to the peaks of the submarine range that was once the Sierra Madre. And one day as they lay on the deck in swimming suits, bent on acquiring a tropical tan, Ted asked her a question.

"By the way," he began, "you've never told me how you managed to keep Sir Joshua in the States. That stalled off war just long enough for this thing to be worked out and presented. How'd you do it?"

Kay dimpled. "Oh, first I tried to tell him I was sick. I got desperately sick."

"I knew he'd fall for that."

"But he didn't. He said a sea voyage would help me."

"Then—what did you do?"

"Well, you see be has a sort of idiosyncrasy toward quinine. Ever since his service in India, where he had to take it day after day, he develops what doctors call a quinine rash, and he hasn't taken any for years."

"Well?"

"Don't you see? His before-dinner cocktail had a little quinine in it, and so did his wine, and so did his tea, and the sugar and the salt.

He kept complaining that everything he ate tasted bitter to him, and I convinced him that it was due to his indigestion."

"And then?"

"Why, then I brought him one of his indigestion capsules, only it didn't have his medicine in it. It had a nice dose of quinine, and in two hours he was pink as a salmon, and so itchy he couldn't sit still!"

Ted began to laugh. "Don't tell me that kept him there!"

"Not that alone," said Kay demurely. "I made him call in a doctor, a friend of mine who—well, who kept asking me to marry him—and I sort of bribed him to tell father he had—I think it was erysipelas he called it. Something violently contagious, anyway.

"And so—?"

"And so we were quarantined for two weeks! And I kept feeding father quinine to keep up the bluff, and—well, we were very strictly quarantined. He just couldn't present his recall!"