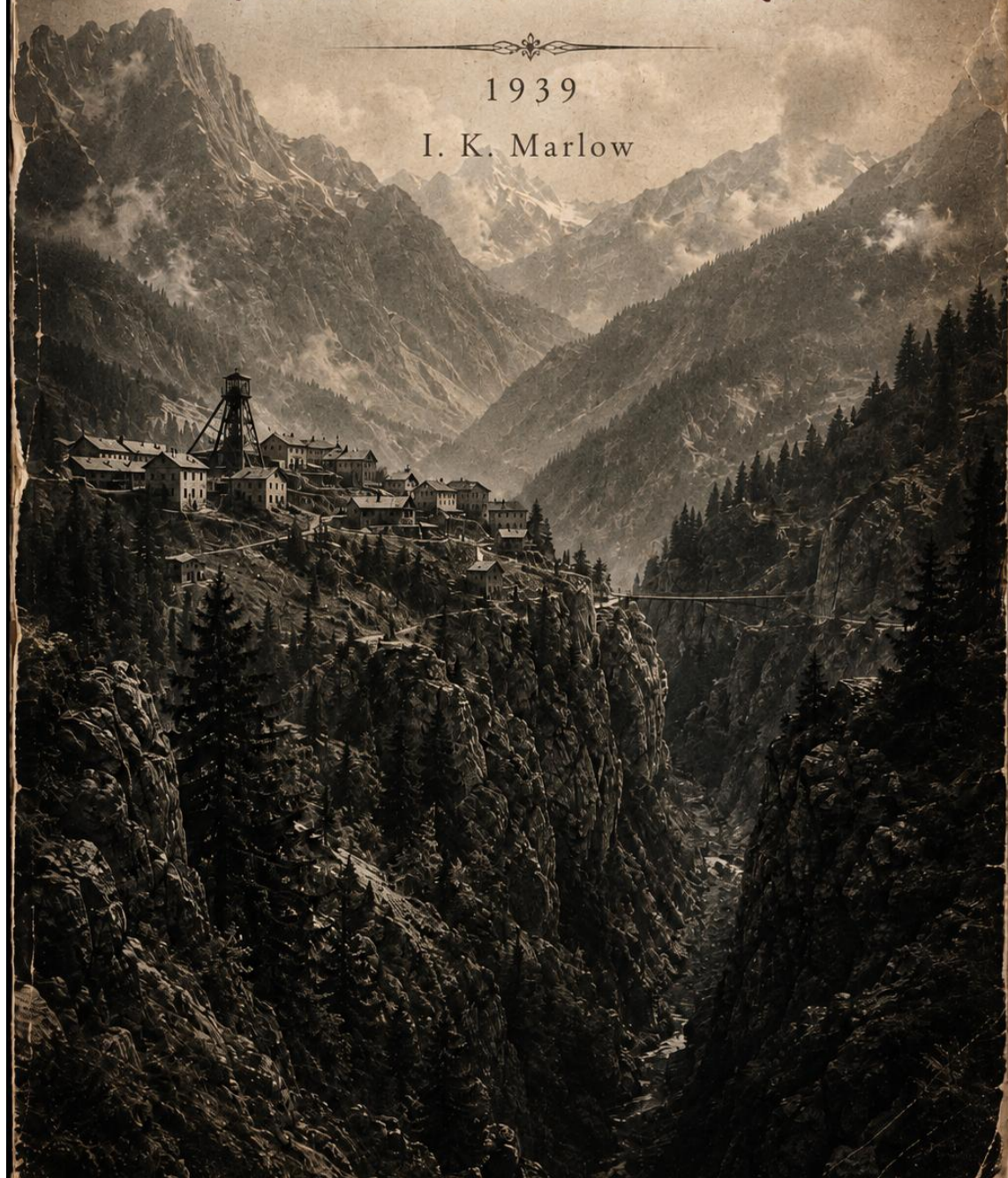


LA POLVERE DI
VALNERA

1939

I. K. Marlow



La Polvere di Valnera

In the late 1930s, before the war reached Italy in full, there was a lonely mining settlement high in the mountains of the north.

It stood above a narrow valley covered almost entirely by forest. Only a few small villages were scattered along the river below, separated by miles of pine and chestnut woods. Beyond them rose steep mountains where roads became mule tracks and the ground was broken by ravines, loose stone, and old landslides.

Valnera was the name of the mining settlement.

By 1939, Valnera was already dying.

The mine had become unprofitable, wages went unpaid, and the company prepared to abandon the place. At the same time, unrest was spreading through the region. Men disappeared after speaking too openly in taverns. Political meetings were held quietly in barns and back rooms. Carabinieri appeared more often on the roads, and strangers passing through the villages were watched carefully.

Everyone knew that another war was coming.

Among the men working at the mine was a foreman named Matteo Riva.

When the order came to close the mine, several cases of dynamite were supposed to be taken down the mountain and returned to a government depot.

Some of them never arrived.

Riva was last seen loading the crates onto a truck.

It is believed that he replaced the dynamite with empty crates and hid the explosives somewhere in the mountains.

He intended to use them later.

No one ever discovered exactly what he was planning. Some believed he wanted to sell the dynamite once the war broke out. Others claimed he had scores to settle.

There were darker rumors.

A railway passed through another valley beyond the mountains. There were bridges, government buildings, and roads used by soldiers. Riva supposedly told one drinking companion that when the country finally fell into chaos, a man with enough explosives could decide who was allowed through the mountains—and who was not.

Then, one autumn night, Riva disappeared.

Somewhere in the mountains, according to locals who lived through those difficult years, Matteo Riva's dynamite is still quietly waiting.

Perhaps it rotted away.

Perhaps the mountain buried it.

Or perhaps, somewhere beyond the ruins of Valnera, there is still a forgotten hiding place.