

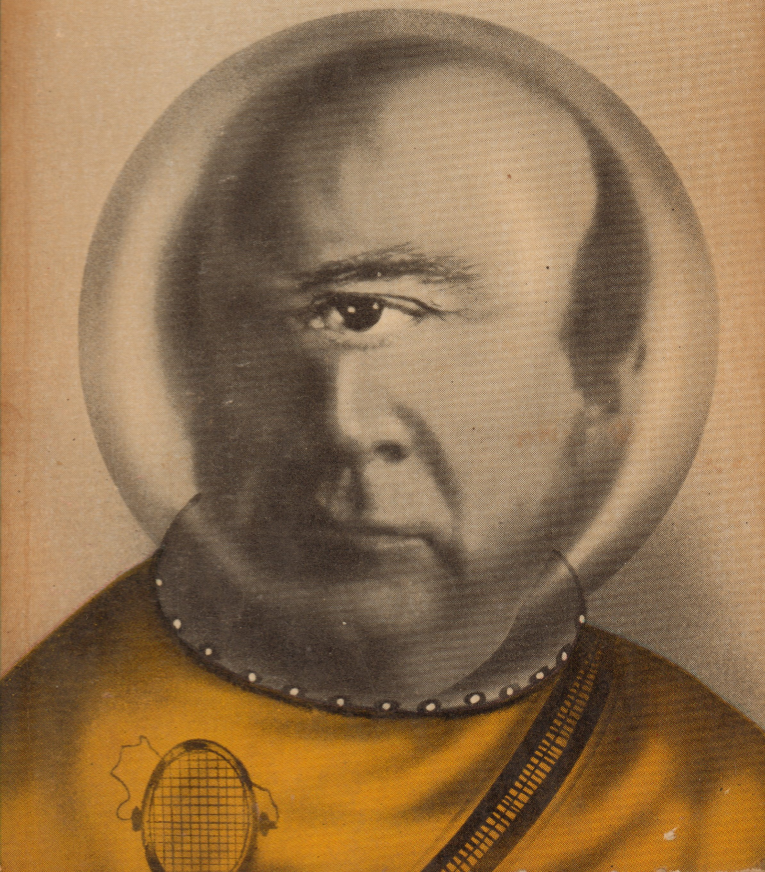
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FRANK BELKNAP LONG'S  
science-fiction masterwork

# THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS

BELMONT

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## **Report of James Morton, chemist:**

*My Dear Mr. Douglas,*

*The fluid you sent me for analysis is the most peculiar I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the substance known as enzymes. Without enzymes, protoplasm would possess enduring vitality, i.e., immortality.*

*That such protoplasm can exist, biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive . . .*

**The science-fiction masterwork about a man who stood between the world and a horrible invasion force . . .**

**THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**

**Belmont Books by  
Frank Belknap Long**

**THE HORROR EXPERT**

**IT WAS THE DAY**

**OF THE ROBOT**

**THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**

# **THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**

**by**

**Frank Belknap Long**



**This book contains the complete text of nine stories from the famous hard-cover edition, and is reprinted by permission of the author.**

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To  
Lyda

## ***Dark Vision***

**IT WAS** a simple misstep that changed the world about him. He was not a man who could be easily betrayed into carelessness. He was careful, cautious; he looked before he leaped; and for twenty-seven years he had avoided physical catastrophe.

Yet now he was falling sheerly. Falling horribly between pylons of flame, his arms flailing emptiness, his long legs jerking.

Ronald Horn was no electrician. He did not understand how a high-voltage transmission line could produce waves of such high frequency that they could only be measured across an inductance by spark gap. It was not until he landed on a high-tension oil switch near the base of Donovan's tremendous generator that he awoke to a realization of peril.

He lay stunned and gasping while all about him flared stupendous surges of energy. Under less hazardous circumstances the simple beauty of the display would have made his pulses race. But now his pulses were racing in sheer terror. He lay groaning and staring, his fingers clutching metal, his face corpse-white in the blinding glare.

It was to his credit that he could keep his head. He lay



rigid and unmoving until they rescued him. How they got him down he never knew. The descent was a nightmare filled with voices. He was aware of strong hands supporting him, faces grimly intent on the job in hand. The job of getting him safely out of that blazing inferno. The hands were competent; the faces convulsed with misgivings.

The hands won. They got him down safely. They—John Donovan and his two young assistants, Fred Anders and William Marston. Gently they supported him beneath a vast and intricate maze of line conductors, whispering reassurances as they guided him to a chair beneath the magnetic field surrounding the conductors, and the electrostatic field issuing from the conductors.

He was sagging; limp. He could not support himself. Donovan hovered before the chair, staring down at him grimly while young Anders went searching for a half-filled whisky flask in the cluttered tool shed which defaced the northeast corner of the power plant.

Horn felt better as soon as the whisky warmed him. He smiled, wanly. "A narrow squeak," he said.

Donovan was furiously angry. He said, "You damned fool! I warned you to be careful. How can you write about the generator when you studied electricity in a kindergarten? Or did you study it at all?"

Horn reddened. "I'm a feature writer on a newspaper, not an encyclopedia," he retorted. "My best friend happens to operate the most powerful electric generator in the United States. And I happen to need copy. There are safer ways of acquiring knowledge, but I was doing nicely until I missed my footing."

"You didn't have to climb all over the high-voltage circuits," rasped Donovan. "You need a nursemaid."

Ordinarily Donovan was a mild-mannered, genial little man. But now his eyes were blazing points of fury. "You very nearly blasted yourself into that fourth-dimension you're always ranting about," he said.

Horn stared up at him aghast. And suddenly as he



stared all the blood ebbed from his face, leaving it ashen.

Donivan seemed to be changing before his eyes. The change was subtle, but sinister. Horn couldn't pin it down to any one feature. He was certain that the man before him did not undergo any profound physical change. The bony structures of his face, for instance, remained unaltered. But there was a subtle difference in the alignment of his features, a shift of expression such as he had never seen on any human face before.

And then suddenly the veils of sense seemed to dissolve about him and he recoiled in his chair with a cry of revulsion. He seemed to be gazing with a kind of supersight into the innermost recesses of Donivan's brain. He was aware of depths within depths of light.

Or was it a negation of light? It seemed at once radiant and opaque, like the luminous darkness at the core of suns. But it wasn't that alien and mysterious radiance that caused him to cry out. What chiefly revolted him was the red and murderous rage that beat down upon him in tangible waves.

He could feel that terrible rage. He could feel it flowing out of Donivan's skull and scorching him with its primal blight. Donivan wanted to murder him. For a terrible instant, he was in mortal danger.

Then the veils of sense seemed to settle back in place. He became objectively aware of Donivan's head hovering above him, the face an obscure blur, the skull still enveloped in that alien and paradoxical light.

Slowly as he stared the malign hatred seemed to ebb from Donivan's features. The light dwindled and disappeared. The face which stared down at him now was the familiar face of his friend. Anger still shone in Donivan's gaze, but his expression was no longer sinister and strange.

Unsteadily Horn stood up. He said, "I owe you a debt of gratitude, John."

He scarcely recognized his own voice. It was like a whisper from the tomb. He was not sure that he was grate-



ful to his friend. But he had to get out into the sunlight again, away from the unspeakable menace of the man. Even though Donovan looked completely normal now, he could still sense something murderous in him, and—yes, obscene. Something that was very primitive and loathsome.

It was even worse when he emerged from the power plant into the sunlight. The miasmal taint of Donovan seemed to follow him, poisoning the very air he breathed.

He dived into a subway kiosk to escape from it. A train was pulling up as he passed through the turnstile and elbowed his way across a crowded platform between normal people like himself. Yet were they normal? Even as he elbowed his way to the edge of the platform a wave of revulsion surged up in him.

It seemed to him that the people about him were all thinking abnormally. He could sense their thoughts beating in upon him. Thoughts of anger, greed and hate, thoughts of primal malice, of passion that was as unregenerate as a basilisk, as coldly merciless as the dark night of space.

Thoughts of murderous egotism and revenge, and little, vagrant thoughts repulsive in their childishness, pettiness and spite. The little thoughts were perhaps the worst. Little irrelevant vagaries that insulted the dignity of man.

The train roared into the station, dissipating the horror for an instant. The people behind him pushed him violently forward into the train as soon as the doors slid open, disrupting the hideous tensions which were beating in upon him from all sides.

But inside the lighted train it was worse still. The horror came rushing back and with it the strange, mysterious trembling of the veils of sense which he had experienced in the power plant. Unsteadily he seated himself, leaning his head forward into his hands, closing his eyes. A queer, strangling fear rose in his mind and seemed to beat back and forth across the surface of his consciousness, like waves in a tub, growing with each traverse. Fear—this



strangeness, this rippling of some forbidden veil—madness. This was madness creeping on him, madness growing in him from some stability-rending injury he had received at that plant, in that fall.

Madness—these people about him could not be hating so, could not be evilly lusting and murdering in their thoughts—

Frantically, he raised his head, to stare about him at the rocking subway car, at familiar bright-colored posters and familiar rocketing signal lights roaring past beyond the windows. He concentrated desperately on the posters above—

His eyes dropped to those of a slim, plain, dark-haired girl across the car, locked with them for an instant—and with a half-sob of shock Horn turned away. He was normal enough to be no prude—but the pure animal flamed in the mind that spoke abruptly from behind those rather stupid dark eyes that had met his. It was obscene in its stark, primitive directness; it was—

Madness—desperately he drove his eyes to bright, meaningless posters; despairingly he felt them swivel under some terrible magnetism he could not control. In half-relief, he saw before him, diagonally down the car, a white-haired woman in neat, well-made clothes, a few paper-wrapped packages in her lap, a half-dreaming expression on her tired, pleasant face. It was a kindly, elderly face—

It dissolved abruptly as the wise grey eyes met his to burn sudden horror into his brain. "George," something whispered and howled to him, "is a fool, but he's my fool. That secretary is a menace, and I do not like her. She eats chocolates all the time. Arsenic would make her writhe. Shoot . . . it would spoil her looks, and George wouldn't feel so sorry for her. Acid would do that. Now what kind of acid is it they use? Just ask for acid? . . ." A picture came, a picture of a face boiling and dissolving hideously into flowing, blackening ruin, and a feeling of



lifting, satisfaction at the sight. Then abruptly it was a cruel caricature of a nude woman sloughing away under searing acid—

He was looking towards the face of a placid, half-dreaming little old lady who had shifted her eyes as the train slowed, checking on her destination. Horn sat paralyzed as he watched the pleasant-faced, gently smiling fiend in female form gather her little packages and walk towards the exit.

A man was before his eyes suddenly, a man of thirty-five or so, dressed in an expensive, well-tailored business suit, a well-filled briefcase in hand. His idly roaming eyes locked with Horn's and desperately Horn tried to look away before the clean-lined, intelligent face dissolved into some yet further horror—

"I wonder," something whispered in an oddly calm, mildly curious way, "who drew up Dad's will. And how he's leaving that estate of his. Must be nearly forty thousand. I'd like to see that will. He's always fussing with those guns of his, since he retired. Load a shotgun shell with dynamite instead of powder. It would probably blow his head off, and I'd be able to check on the will." For the instant of the revelation, a queer emotion of detached and unintense curiosity accompanied it; a feeling that blowing off his father's head was the natural and logical way of discovering the contents of the will in which he was mildly interested, a strange indifference to the money that might result—

The contact broke, weakened for an instant as the man's eye wavered towards a girl thrusting her way through the now-crowded car, then strengthened again queerly—and revoltingly, for an instant, till that queer indifference gained sway over Horn's own reactions to the completely and utterly animal pictured thoughts that sickened him.

Somehow, Ronald Horn found himself walking a street, his mind a rolling tumult of fantastic horrors. Vaguely, he remembered fighting his way off the train and out of the



station, up to the clean air again, down the quietest street he could find, where eyes did not drill into his, washing a reeking tide of foul thoughts into his brain. For an instant, the hulking, red-headed man in work-stained clothes boiled up in memory, the man who had stood in line behind a tired-looking old man getting change and had, quite casually broadcast his determination to wring that scrawny neck between his own calloused paws and take the overstuffed billfold.

The thing was clear—too clear now. It was not his own madness—yet—but the acquisition of telepathy in effective form, the amplification of that extrasensory perception science was just discovering.

They wanted that! They were looking for it! God! They wanted it perhaps, to see what stinking cesspools the minds of men were? To find for themselves the sweet-faced fiends who tried to remember which acid it was they needed?

To find that trusted executives decided, simply, that patricide was the simplest, quickest way to read a will?

He stumbled on dazedly, while a grey mist floated out of the air with the setting of the sun, a damp chill grew and wrapped the city in cotton folds so that streetlights became golden luminosities glowing in the muffling white. Presently some clarity of mind returned, and a lessening of the horror of human kind. Old thought habits reasserted themselves, and a terrible longing for companionship, for someone to explain this to, returned.

He was trembling uncontrollably when he appeared at the door of Gloria Moore's apartment. Almost reluctantly she admitted him, closing the door softly behind her. She was wearing a blue silk evening dress which revealed the lovely roundness of her white throat and shoulders, and the supple grace of her slender young body.

She stood for an instant straight and unmoving just inside the doorway, staring in amazement at his white face and disheveled clothes.



"Why didn't you phone, Ronald?" she said. "I was just going out. I have a dinner engagement, you know."

Suddenly she paled. He was looking at her in the strangest way. The way he was looking at her was—yes, frightening. She had never feared him before, but now she was really afraid.

Her apprehension increased when he embraced her. "Darling," he murmured, "I'm in serious trouble. I must talk to you."

His fingers caressed her cheeks, her hair. The coldness of his flesh appalled her, but she managed to murmur, "Yes, dear, if you wish."

She took his hand and led him down a long, dark hall into the lighted living room of the apartment. He did not sit down. He crossed to the center of the room and stood facing her, his lips quivering. Suddenly he began to talk.

Gloria Moore was Horn's fiancée. He had never doubted her loyalty; he had never doubted that she was as sweet and gracious as she looked. But now a terrible doubt assailed him.

A subtle, hideous change was creeping into her features. As the mysterious light deepened about her, her expression became alien and strange. For an instant he could distinguish in the depths of the light the tumbled, dark glory of her hair, her lunate-shaped mouth and her glowing dark eyes. Then her hidden thoughts merged with his and he saw only her skull waveringly outlined in the alien radiance.

Beating in upon him were thoughts of fierce resentment, horror and betrayal. She was wordlessly accusing him of the blackest crimes. She was accusing him of burdening her with revelations she did not care to share. She disbelieved him anyway—thought him quite mad. She had always secretly despised him, but now she hated and feared him.

She was thinking, "His mind has become warped. Why should he bring his troubles to me? I was a fool to be-



come engaged to him. He is not as wealthy as Jim Prentiss."

Suddenly she turned and moved away from him, breaking the spell for an instant. The light seemed to diminish about her as she moved away across the room. She stopped before a desk by the window, and stood staring intently down at a long, slender object which glittered in the pale light of a green-shaded reading lamp. The light illumed the little dark coils at the nape of her neck, the patrician straightness of her shoulders.

Idly she picked up the paper knife from the desk and returned to where he was standing. Slowly the mysterious radiance deepened about her head again, obscuring her features.

A shiver of cold horror ran through Horn. Her thoughts were becoming malign now. Malign and venomous. "I will stab him. He is troubling, disturbing me. I hate him."

She was swaying slowly backward and forward when Horn tore his gaze from her face. He had reached the breaking point; he could endure no more. With a choking sob he turned from her and stumbled despairingly from the apartment.

Utter terror engulfed him when he emerged into the street. All his life seemed to draw to an agonizing mental focus in his head. He became aware of his brain as a pulsing, throbbing center of anguish and unutterable torment, an inflamed hub that drew the impulses of his nerves to a tight, curling bedlam in his skull.

So vicious, so savagely, primitively deadly were the thoughts that flowed in upon him that his sanity tottered and he had a momentary impulse to run shrieking through the night.

As he staggered down dimly lit streets in blind and intolerable anguish, the life of the city took on a ghastly nightmare quality in his sight. He brushed against people who seemed perfectly normal outwardly, but whose minds



were cesspools of maggoty hate and carnality and revolting spite.

He saw a horse-drawn brewery truck rumbling by, the man in the driver's seat lashing the great, piebald beasts in his charge.

Outwardly the driver was applying his whip to the flanks of animals. But subjectively he was torturing human beings, conjuring up in his savage mind symbols of human superiority which filled him with insensate rage and hate.

All that was gracious and beautiful groaned beneath the lash in his primitive, warped mind. Flowing out from him were thoughts so unspeakably revolting that they beat in an anvil chorus of torment in Horn's inflamed brain.

He saw a man and a girl walking arm in arm down the street. The girl dropped her purse and the man stopped to pick it up. His expression as he straightened was guileless, deferential, but his thoughts were barbed with rancor.

"She is always dropping things," he was thinking, his head aureoled in the obscuring light. "Apparently she was born clumsy. Every time we go out she drops her purse or her handkerchief, and I have to grovel."

Suddenly malignancy darkened his thoughts. "I should never have married her. Marriage is a deception. She appeals to me physically, but I hate her constant nagging. Her laugh is silly. If she falls under some car, she won't drop things or laugh."

Suddenly Horn writhed as though a live coal had descended on his brain. The man walking with the girl seemed about to push her with brutal violence into the gutter!

The girl was fragile, radiant, lovely. How horrible that she should be wed to that murderous savage! Horn had an agonizing vision of innocence corroded, betrayed. But even as he clenched his fists, he became aware of her thoughts merging with his own.

He turned away, disillusioned, revolted, and went reeling blindly through the night. Again that terrifying sense that he was going mad.



He saw a man collide with a fire hydrant and go reeling out into the street. The man's thoughts were ghastly in their self-directed hate.

"You saw that impediment, but you did not avoid it. You wanted to injure yourself. You wanted to injure yourself seriously, because life is horrible and an agony, and there is no sense in it at all.

"Death is sweet and if I could destroy myself utterly I would find peace. I would find peace in the darkness of the grave. If only I could die and be wrapped in darkness and forgetfulness. To cease to struggle, to cease to breathe! Before I was born I knew such peace. I did not will to be born.

"Next time I will really injure myself. I shall kill myself. A revolver . . . a high building. I would die instantly if I leaped from the Empire State Building. Are there guards on the observation roof? If I climbed the rail swiftly they could not stop me.

"The long fall through space, the utter shattering of my body would bring release. I would be crushed, mangled, but there would be peace."

Suddenly Horn did an incredible thing. He stopped walking abruptly and screamed. Screamed in anguish. Once as a child he had known such anguish.

In a dream of childhood he had been called suddenly by his mother into a circle of radiant people, men and women with heavenly faces and godlike mien. In the center of that circle he had stood entranced, staring in childlike wonder and joy at the sweet countenances of women who seemed endowed with more than womanly grace, at men who were kindly and beneficent and paternal.

Then, with terrifying suddenness, the men and women about him had turned into reptiles and ferocious beasts. They had closed in upon him with feral snarls and venomous hissings. Horrible—horrible had been that dream.

He seemed now to be standing in that circle again, fangs



menacing his flesh. Swiftly he began to walk again, malign torment swelling in his brain.

Anne Carlyle gasped when he appeared at the Golden Falcon, so excessive was his pallor, so unsteady his gait. He approached her table waveringly between the staring guests, his eyes tortured, dark pools in his white face.

Anne Carlyle was a strange, enigmatic girl. Her friends thought her gay and superficial, her enemies mercenary, coldly calculating. Her behavior was that of a very sophisticated young lady. A dancer in the Golden Falcon, she was shrewdly aware that the patrons of the night club preferred to be entertained by women of experience.

And when a girl has a widowed mother to support—Anne Carlyle had never told Horn about her mother.

He crossed unsteadily to her table and sat down beside her. His hand went out and clasped her fingers. She did not recoil from him when he said, "Anne, I'm in trouble."

"What is it, dear?"

In halting syllables Horn told her. He told her about the ghastly mishap that had occurred in the power plant. He spoke of his hideous gift of supersight. He did not see the light because he kept his eyes averted. But suddenly he could feel her thoughts flowing out to him, merging with his consciousness. The thoughts of Anne Carlyle flowing into his brain.

They were wondrously sweet and consoling thoughts. It was incredible, but there did not seem to be any maliciousness in Anne Carlyle at all.

He was aware of depraved and hateful thoughts beating in upon him from all sides. But the strongest influx was not malicious at all. Close to him, protecting him from all the greed and envy and merciless hate in the minds of the Golden Falcon's patrons was a wavering barrier of compassion and light.

Somehow he could distinguish between the inflowing waves, could sense the close and vibrant goodness of Anne Carlyle. It was almost unalloyed. Little childish spite



impulses surged through it, but they were so trivial compared to her simple goodness.

The spite impulses were not directed against him at all. They were directed against Anne's rivals in the night club. Even as she consoled him she was thinking, "He needs me desperately. I must remain by his side. It will probably mean that that wretched Wilson girl will steal my act. If I leave the club tonight she will stop at nothing to discredit me. She has been waiting for a chance to step into my shoes. But nothing matters but Ron's peace and safety. I have always loved him."

Suddenly she was speaking to him. "Whatever it is, dear, we will fight it together. Shock may drive us out of ourselves for a time. But Dale Croyce will know how to dispel this."

He said, "Dale Croyce. Dale Croyce. Yes, Dale might know."

"Then let us go to him tonight."

Dale Croyce wasn't in his study when they arrived at his home. He was sitting in his library smoking. A colored manservant met them at the door and escorted them into the psychiatrist's presence.

When Croyce saw them he laid down the book he was reading, and stood up. He seemed surprised to see them together. He said, "Ronald and Anne. How nice."

Then he perceived how pale Horn was and his manner changed. He perceived at once that they had not dropped in for a snack at midnight.

Dale Croyce was an experimental psychiatrist. He experimented with mice and dogs because their minds were simpler, almost simple enough that the higher mind of the man might understand their workings. He knew more about human psychology than any other man in America—which was very little. A middle-aged, blue-eyed man below medium height, he had learned the hardest lesson that any man may learn: he never would know much that was important about his specialty. All who study any sub-



ject well find that out. Therefore, he listened attentively when Horn talked.

He did not interrupt, nor ask questions. He simply listened, sharp discernment in his gaze. To him, Horn's desperate words began to have a meaning; an understanding of the hell into which the man had been thrown came slowly.

When he spoke his voice was somewhat awed, somewhat saddened, but completely reassuring in its certainty of knowledge. "I think I can guess what happened in the power plant," he sighed. "It could not be done by intent, but by that trillionth chance that any improbability may happen, it happened to you. You were electrocuted, a terrific surge of current burning through your nerves. But electricity can cure as well as kill; the electric needle can start a dead heart. Somehow it . . . welded your nerves, reduced the resistance that makes normal man incapable of receiving thought, though we know thought is similar to an electrical phenomenon. Which should have killed you, but—by the trillionth chance—did not.

"Now you are supertelepathic, capable of receiving thought. But so sensitive that you receive not only the surface, conscious thoughts of men, but the deeper, subconscious thoughts and urges.

"You would not experience such horror and revulsion if you could merely tap the conscious patterns. The conscious mind of man is a thin, pale stream, guarded by a censor, and in well-disciplined minds the dark and horrible currents of the subconscious seldom flow to the surface as verbal or visual concepts.

"The censor stands guard, repressing them as they arrive, denying them conscious expression. The censor is the civilized part of your mind, your heritage from a few thousand years of civilization. You were taught as a child to repress your subconscious impulses, to feel horror and shame when they welled up into the conscious stream.

"In every man's subconscious mind are hideous essences



for each human desire and emotion. In some minds the dark essences slumber deeply, and do not so constantly assail the censor. Some people are less primitive than others. Possibly you can only tap the subconscious when it becomes turbulent and surges up close to the conscious stream. Just before it flows in little malign eddies past the censor. You say that some minds seem less hideous to you than others. The primitive impulses may well be less turbulent in such minds."

Horn nodded and gazed at Anne Carlyle, sudden wonder in his gaze.

"The subconscious mind is really frightful," resumed Croyce. "It is utterly direct, utterly without pretense or the indirection called tact. It is a cesspool of such horrible, vagrant and lightly held thoughts that any man given the power you have to apprehend them would go mad in half a day.

"If you know modern psychology you will know what I mean. The most powerful and disorderly impulses are those of sex, but hunger, hate, fear, acquisitiveness, rage play scarcely less vital roles. Freud believed that there is a universal death impulse which causes some men to hate life so bitterly that they seek to destroy themselves or inflict pain on others.

"Even when these impulses do not flow into the conscious stream as well-defined concepts, they influence behavior in the form of subconscious reactions. A perfectly normal man, for instance, may be mildly curious as to what his father's will is, just how he proposes to distribute his capital after his death. That mild curiosity has a subconscious reaction which is a wish that the old man would die or be killed so that the will might be read. That, you see, is the simple, logical—though brutal—way.

"Or a man slips and falls down. Psychologists say that that may very well be because the man wants to commit suicide, and the little slip that bruises his elbow is an emotional letting off of the morbid desire in his sub-



conscious. People will toy with sharp instruments, knives, forks, razor blades with no conscious intention of inflicting wounds on anyone—but with a subconscious reaction which whispers, ‘You don’t like him. He annoys. Kill him and end the annoyance.’ ”

Horn nodded, thinking of his curious misstep in the power plant, of the man who had stumbled over a hydrant, and of the paper knife which Gloria Moore had toyed with idly.

“Ironically enough, you do not appear to be able to tap your own subconscious stream. It is not strange that you cannot do so. A television recorder could not transform energies pervading the receiving mechanism itself. They would not flow in through the proper channels.

“Naturally, then, the world of people around you seems populated with a different—and utterly loathsome—breed.” The psychologist shrugged. “They aren’t. They’re normal—and harmless. The censor does its duty. But you’ll be mad tomorrow if you are consciously made aware of thoughts no more horrible than those you are yourself thinking!”

“I will.” Horn groaned. “I dare not look at you too closely, lest your face dissolve away to another of those gateways to hell. What can I do? What can you do for me?”

“Probably kill you,” Croyce exploded with a gusty sigh. “The medicine for this does not exist—for it has never before been known to happen.”

Horn groaned. “Croyce—what of those madmen who have delusions of persecution? Do you suppose—”

Croyce started. “That is something no one ever suggested, so far as I know. If a man had your power in lesser degree—so he was not aware he had it—all minds would seem to mean death to him.

“But there is something that I can try. A derivative of curare.”

“Arrow poison?” Horn looked up in sudden fear, and



for an instant, met Croyce's eyes. Hastily he looked away even as the flesh of Croyce's face dissolved to a grinning skull, and pulsing light seemed to glow about his head.

"It works," Croyce explained, "by making the nerves have high resistance. The nerve messages to move the heart and lungs cannot pass through. I've been experimenting with a derivative that affects the brain rather than those nerves. That is what you seem to need—less sensitivity of nerve. Come."

Wearily, desperately, he followed Dale Croyce back to his little laboratory, stood stiff and tense as the scientist prepared the glittering needle, and injected with minute caution a tiny drop of colorless liquid into his arm. White fire raced up his nerves, exploded within his skull—

When he awoke Anne Carlyle was sitting beside him. He was reclining on a sofa in Croyce's library and she was holding his hand and smiling down at him.

Her face was wondrously radiant. For what seemed centuries he stared at her in silence, stared fearfully. But her face did not recede or vanish. No mysterious light arose to obscure its lovely contour. His first feeling was a vast relief that the power, the vision, was gone. Then, as he looked into her wide, anxiously questioning eyes, a greater satisfaction came, that he could look into those eyes and see them.

A little unsteadily he sat up. He said, "Anne, Anne, it is gone. The horror is gone now."

The anxious questioning gave way to relief and something yet more satisfying.

## *The Black Druid*

MR. STEPHEN BENEFIELD entered the library and hung his black Chesterfield overcoat on the rack which the trustees had grudgingly provided for the accommodation of inclement and cold weather accessories. There were seven other overcoats on the rack. Mr. Benefield paused to count them—he was a methodical and observing man—and passed to the reference desk. When the librarian approached him he nodded amiably.

“I wish to peruse, please, Lucian Brown’s *The Cromlech Jeelos*. It is No. 3268 A. I looked it up yesterday in the catalogue.”

The librarian scowled and went in search of the book. When she returned with it Mr. Benefield took it firmly between his lean, gloved hands and turned the pages until he found the passage he was seeking. “Rutilius Namatianus affirmed that the Druids invested all contiguous objects with their peculiar evil, so that anyone who touched so much as the hem of their robes was in deadly danger of becoming a partaker of their fallen divinity.”

Closing the book Mr. Benefield smiled and passed it back over the desk. “That is the passage I was looking



for," he explained. "I do not believe I shall need a copy of it. I thought it might be a very long passage, but it is so brief that I can remember enough of it to paraphrase it without the aid of a written copy. Thank you very much. I am Stephen Benefield, an archeologist. I use such passages in my books."

"They say his books are becoming frightfully obscure," cogitated the librarian as she returned *The Cromlech Jeelos* to its prescribed niche. "I don't wonder! How can a man who takes Lucian Brown seriously write comprehensively?"

Mr. Benefield made his way solemnly back to the coat rack and stared for a moment in chagrin at the empty hook whereon he had hung his Chesterfield. "I am sure that I hung my coat on that rack," he ruminated. "And where is it now?"

Feeling decidedly anxious, he began hastily to recount the coats on the rack. There were still five garments remaining, and his anxiety did not diminish until he had completed his enumeration. Someone had deliberately—and illegitimately—lifted Mr. Benefield's Chesterfield from its original hook and hung it on the opposite side of the rack! He recognized it immediately by its grey silk lining and velvet collar. Taking it indignantly down he put it on and left the building.

All the way to the IRT, which was to convey Mr. Benefield to his home in the Bronx, he kept muttering to himself. "What right had anyone to tinker with my overcoat?"

Descending the subway stairs he deposited a worn token in the inevitable turnstile and boarded a train labeled 180th Street, Bronx Park.

The car was disagreeably crowded, but Mr. Benefield darted towards and successfully captured a seat near the door which a Gargantuan Italian had just previously vacated. Sinking into it with relief he crossed his legs and stared contemptuously at the passengers opposite him.



“Vulgar and stupid people,” he muttered to himself. “What do they know of art and science and the splendor of antiquity?”

Mr. Benefield was quite well informed in regard to antiquity. He had visited Egypt and explored all the ruins that are to be found in that maleficent and grievously exploited land; he was familiar with Tibet and its glamorous mountain monasteries; he had poked into forbidden volumes in the libraries of central China and climbed the Andes to stare at the colossal stone monuments left by the pre-Incas for the edification of mere superior Nordics. And incidentally, he had spent seven years at Yale and emerged with a Ph.D. and a conviction that archeology was a sacred science and that there were more things in it than are dreamed of in our vulgar philosophies.

But unfortunately Mr. Benefield was now unhappily married and financially harassed and was no longer able to devote himself as exclusively as he might have wished to his favorite science. In fact, his personality had become distorted through suppression. He still took his archeological researches seriously, which was commendable, but for several months now he had been interesting himself in less savory pursuits, pursuits which intelligent men in the twentieth century do not ordinarily approve of, and his academic colleagues had ceased to regard him with unqualified respect.

Indeed, several of Mr. Benefield's recent utterances—the statement that he believed in vampires, for instance, and that Haitian voodooism was not a thing to be lightly sniffed at—had even alienated a considerable number of his *imaginative* friends. Mr. Benefield had actually become, in his less lucid moments, a kind of eclectic theosophist. He did not care for the didactic and sugary mysticism of Madame Blavatsky and he despised the modern exponents of her cult, but he shared the mystical credulity of the poet Maeterlinck and the medieval, albeit not precisely the religious, bias, of such contemporary reactionaries as



Chesterton and Belloc. In brief, he believed that life is a mysterious business and that we know very little about it. Certain fragments of Aurignacian Venuses which he had diligently collected in the rock caverns of the Pyrenees had confirmed him in his hypothesis.

But now as he sat in the subway *en route* to the Bronx he was not thinking of Aurignacian Venuses. He was not even thinking of the Jeelos of the Dolmens that occupy so many fascinating pages in Lucian Brown's scholarly brochure. His mind was wholly taken up with the people opposite him. They were returning his stares with an avidness that somehow horrified him.

They were looking at him as though they were convulsed with curiosity; almost as though their eyes were being drawn from their heads in his direction by some power outside of themselves.

It is true that Mr. Benefield was, in some respects, an odd-looking man. His hair was absurdly long and it descended upon his forehead in a circular, antiquated bang; his hat was two sizes too small for his immoderately large head—a brachycephalic head, although he boasted twenty generations of Saxon forebears—and his socks, which his wife had purchased for him, were of heavy wool, and unsupported by garters they bulged above his shoes like the elephantine folds on the torso of an Abyssinian eunuch.

But these idiosyncrasies were not, in themselves, sufficient to account for the horrified expressions on the faces of his fellow-passengers. Mr. Benefield wondered if by any chance he had neglected to shave before leaving home that morning. His beard was unusually prolific and one day's neglect was sufficient to render it a faintly conspicuous object. Not so conspicuous, indeed, as the fallen hose or antiquated bang, but Mr. Benefield was supremely unconscious of his general ludicrousness. It was merely his beard that worried him, and to make certain that he had really shaved—his memory failed to record the act—he



raised his right hand and passed it slowly over his chin.

His chin was wet and dripping! Mr. Benefield snatched his hand away and stared at it in horror. Upon his palm lay a moist, black, inexplicable smudge. A gelatinous smudge.

He coughed uneasily. He had no recollection of having passed under a dirty drain, but under something of the sort he must, of necessity, have walked. "From one of the tall buildings," he muttered, under his breath. "It rained yesterday and the wind has blown the filthy water out of the drain on to my face. I must be a ludicrous spectacle indeed. No wonder they are staring at me!"

His dignity would not permit him to remain in his seat after this distressing discovery. Rising hastily he passed to the rear of the car, and concealed himself in a corner of the vestibule.

There were only two other persons in the vestibule—a child of seven and its elderly nurse.

The child saw Mr. Benefield first. It stared for a moment in abject terror; then it buried its frightened face in the folds of its guardian's coat. "Black bogey man!" she screamed. "I wanna get off!"

Instantly the nurse raised her face. For a second she gazed at Mr. Benefield in sheer incredulity; then distress deepened to terror in her eyes, and with a scream she seized the child by the arm and retreated into the car.

Fortunately for Mr. Benefield the car at that moment arrived at his station and he was able to elude the onrush of curious passengers that promptly ensued. Dashing wildly across the platform he ascended the stairs to the street and hurled himself into the adjacent darkness.

The darkness was soothing; it was Gilead to his impaired pride. He strode through it in silence, literally wrapped in it, his mind for a moment enjoying the quietude that precedes a storm. He hadn't dared to touch his face again.

He hadn't dared, but in a moment he would dare. The



darkness was rapidly restoring his confidence and in a moment he would dare anything. He was conscious of a dim power stirring within him. But at the same time he experienced an overwhelming sense of discomfiture, of constriction. His clothes, he felt, were stifling him. It was absurd that he should be stifled by that hideous stiff thing that encircled his neck. What was it called? Ah, yes, a collar! He had almost forgotten the name of it, but remembering suddenly he ripped it off and threw it upon the pavement. Then he felt his face again. It was slimy, blubbery. His hand slid over it.

“Good God!” he gasped, and began to run. He must reach home as quickly as possible and wash from his face the unspeakable filth that had descended upon it!

He ran for fully five minutes, and arrived at the door of his lodging completely out of breath. As he fumbled hectically for his key he experienced an overwhelming sense of horror, and of shame, which was paradoxically mingled with a wild and turbulent rebelliousness. It was as though he had suddenly, in some hideous and unnatural manner, broken the mold of humanity in which we have been cast. It was almost as though—he couldn’t express it precisely—as though he had become a sharer of some esoteric and limitless divinity, and might experience every mundane emotion simultaneously; as though all the pleasures and all the agonies in a human life span might be his in a single instant, and also pleasures and pains that have no counterparts in the world we know.

And then—Mr. Benefield saw a face in the glass panel before him that defiled the exterior of the door. Instantly his whole being became flooded with an unearthly, paralyzing fear, with a consuming and overpowering revulsion. The soft, fleshy feel of his face had vaguely suggested the abnormal, but this, this, *this*—! It wasn’t, dear God, it wasn’t even anything human that stared back at him.

*Not human. Not human.* It didn’t even remotely re-



seem a human face. It was covered with thick dark hair and where its mouth should have been—

Mr. Benefield recoiled before the awful horror of the thing. His brain had gone cold; he could not swallow. Slowly, dumbly, he raised his hands and gazed at them. It was as he had feared. The—the claws were very long. Quickly he unsheathed them in the heavy folds of flesh on his moist black palms. Almost—a stab of terror crossed his face as he made the acknowledgment in that moment of torture and doubt—almost he preferred the face. The face—had eyes. At least eyes. *His* eyes. But could he swear to that? Even now, as he stared hysterically into them they seemed to melt and merge with that awful face.

Familiar thoughts were forming in a brain that was no longer wholly his. He knew that the brain was no longer in its entirety his brain because with the phrases he recognized were mingled obscene and outlandish syllables derived from some hellish idiom that was sufficiently Gaelic in its sibilants to be perhaps very vaguely comprehensible to him. Or, if not actually comprehensible, at least damnably suggestive.

*“Ushtey Doinney! Kea! Doinney! The overcoat! The overcoat! It isn’t yours. He wore it. Dei Ai. Sinthat. Rutilius—Rutilius Namatiamus knew. He knew. They do not die. The coat! The coat! For God’s dear sake, take it off! Don’t you understand. Doinney Ushty. He, the Druid—a Vate—in the library. In America, yes, yes! They do not die.”*

With a tremendous effort of will Mr. Benefield seized the lapels of his overcoat and sought to take it off. But in the glass the *thing* did not approve. Its eyes shone with a malign lust and from the cavern in its dark face black saliva dripped.

*“Gush—ur!”*

Almost Mr. Benefield succumbed to its obscene plea. Almost he craved to wallow in rapture unspeakable in the



unclean sty where—but no, no, it was unthinkable. A voice roared within him.

*“It’s damned Celtic superstition.* The Romans drove the little people into the hills; with steel and flame they slew their dark gods. They spat upon the Vates and the Bards. The Saxons and the Normans spat too! And you? Their blood is in you. Slay! Laugh! You are a scion of the invincible races! No Vate can withstand you. Slay their priests.”

There came to him then a sudden sense of power. It was as though all his forebears—Romans, Saxons, Normans, Danes—had suddenly come to life within him, and were urging him forward, shrieking into his ears: “Fight, fight! For Caesar, for Arthur, for clean gods and brave, for valour and mercy and your very soul!”

With a shout so tremendous that it seemed scarcely even by derivation Benefieldian he tore off his outer garment and hurled it furiously from him. *“Eadem qua te insinua-veris retro via repetenda est!”* he cried. “You—you cringing Celtic obscenity!”

He hurled the malediction directly at what he thought had become himself. But when he looked again, when he peered with angry, defiant eyes at the image in the glass he discovered that it had lost all of its loathsomeness. Whereupon his fury evaporated, as well it might, for the reflection of the original Mr. Benefield was scarcely an anger-provoking object. And the original Mr. Benefield it was that now stared back at him.

Mingled with the relief which he overwhelmingly experienced at this discovery was an unaccountable sensation of lassitude. He began, apparently, to exist in a kind of trance. Getting out his keys he opened the door and passed almost unconsciously through the vestibule and up two flights of stairs to his room. He wondered vaguely if his wife would reproach him for coming home so late. If she knew—but no, he would not tell her. The experience was already receding in his mind. Even now he doubted it and



in time it would perhaps be forgotten even by himself. And he was so very tired—the fragmentary vestige of his reason that remained on its throne warned him that it would never do to argue with his wife or attempt to explain anything to her. Only sleep could restore his shattered psyche; and he must contrive somehow to get into his bed unobserved. It was a curious world—a very inexplicable and curious world, and if people were as intelligent as certain misguided fools believed they would not ask questions about—well, Druids, or for that matter, about anything. They would accept everything as proved, Q.E.D., and simply go to sleep—like contented, well-nourished cats.

Unfortunately Mr. Benefield was not permitted to sleep uninterrupted until ten o'clock, his usual hour for rising, on the following morning. At eight minutes to nine he was awakened by his wife, who exclaimed, "That silly old creature across the hall, Mrs. Harmone, just got me up to tell me a crazy story. She has been idiotically frightened, and she says there was a burglar in the house at about eleven o'clock last night!"

"A burglar?" inquired Mr. Benefield sleepily. "How dreadful!"

"Yes, dreadful—and very queer if true. What do you think the man did?"

"I can't hazard a guess." Mr. Benefield's emotional self was still deeply immersed in sleep, i.e., in his subconscious, and he spoke with cool intellectual detachment.

"He was tall, and very, very thin and he climbed in by the parlor window. Mrs. Harmone was dozing in a chair near the center of the room and she saw him. She didn't dare scream for fear he would shoot her. She simply sat and watched him, trying not to breathe. He went right through the parlor and out into the hall. And a moment later she heard him close the front door. He came in the window and went out the door!"



"Wasn't that unusual—for a burglar?" murmured Mr. Benefield.

"Mrs. Harmone thought so. And as soon as he shut the door she dashed towards it, and peered through the curtains at him.

"What do you think? *The man had left his overcoat on the porch*, and he was bending over to recover it when Mrs. Harmone peered out at him. While she watched him he put it on. His back was turned towards her, but she said—his head looked very queer. Nasty, she said. It gave her the shivers. He wore an English bowler hat, which covered most of it, but his ears, she said, stood out. And they were very black—and pointed!"

"Pointed!" echoed Mr. Benefield. He was fully awake now, and experiencing an acute and lively horror.

"Actually—pointed. Or so she claims. And then, she said, he descended the stairs and went shuffling off down the street. She went out on the porch and watched him until he turned the corner. And then, she said, she had to go in, because there was such a horrid, fearsome odor—like you smell at the zoo, in monkey houses, she said. Then she frowned, and shook her head. 'But it wasn't a monkey smell exactly. It was more like—more like snakes!'"

Mr. Benefield groaned and clutched valiantly at a straw. "I think," he affirmed, "that Mrs. Harmone's nervous energy is unfortunately discharged through the efferent channels of those sensory motor arcs which comprise what neurologists would call the focus of cortical awareness. She visions things which are scarcely present to the senses."

"She imagines things, you mean?"

"Yes, my dear. That expresses it quite succinctly. She imagines things. Now, please do not wake me for another hour."

Mr. Benefield turned upon his side and went resolutely to sleep. But in the dream that immediately ensued he encountered the very thing that he had hoped to avoid and

was obliged, perforce, to pay subconscious tribute to the varacity of Mrs. Harmone. "God's Death!" he shouted, as he tracked it to its lair in a hellish wood. "Does a Knight of Malta fear such as you?"



## *The Space-Eaters*

*"The cross is not a passive agent. It protects the pure of heart, and it has often appeared in the air above our sabbats, confusing and dispersing the powers of Darkness."*

JOHN DEE'S Necronomicon

THE HORROR came to Partridgeville in a blind fog.

All that afternoon thick vapours from the sea had swirled and eddied about the farm, and the room in which we sat swam with moisture. The fog ascended in spirals from beneath the door, and its long, moist fingers caressed my hair until it dripped. The square-paned windows were coated with a thick, dewlike moisture; the air was heavy and dank and unbelievably cold.

I stared gloomily at my friend. He had turned his back to the window and was writing furiously. He was a tall, slim man with a slight stoop and abnormally broad shoulders. In profile his face was impressive. He had an extremely broad forehead, long nose and slightly protuberant chin—a strong, sensitive face which suggested a wildly imaginative nature held in restraint by a profoundly sceptical intellect.

My friend wrote short stories. He wrote to please him-

self, in defiance of contemporary taste, and his tales were unusual. They would have delighted Poe; they would have delighted Hawthorne, or Ambrose Bierce, or Villiers de l'Isle Adam. They were terrible and somber studies of abnormal men, abnormal beasts, abnormal plants. He wrote of remote and unholy realms of imagination and horror, and the colors, sounds and odors which he dared to evoke were never seen, heard or smelt on the familiar side of the moon. He projected his shameless creations against wormy and shadow haunted backgrounds. They stalked loathsomely through tall and lonely forests, over ragged mountains, and slithered evilly down the stairs of ancient houses, and between the piles of rotting black wharves.

One of his tales, *The House of the Worm*, had induced a young student at a Midwestern University to seek refuge in an enormous red-black building where everyone approved of his sitting on the floor and shouting at the top of his voice: "Lo, my beloved is fairer than all the lilies among the lilies in the lily garden." Another, *The Defilers*, had brought him precisely three hundred and ten letters of indignation from local readers when it appeared in the *Partridgeville Gazette*.

As I continued to stare at him he suddenly stopped writing and shook his head. "I can't do it," he said. "I should have to invent a new language. And yet I can comprehend the thing emotionally, intuitively, if you will. If I could only convey it in a sentence somehow—the strange crawling of its fleshless spirit!"

"Is it some new horror?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It is not new to me. I have known and felt it for years—a horror utterly beyond anything your prosaic brain can conceive."

"Thank you," I said.

"All human brains are prosaic," he elaborated. "I meant no offense. It is the shadowy terrors that lurk behind and above them that are mysterious and awful. Our little



brains—what do they know of the loathly, crawly things that come down from outer space and suck us dry? I think sometimes they lodge in our heads, and our brains feel them, but when they stretch out horrid tentacles to claw and absorb us we go screaming mad; and of what use are brains then?”

“But you can’t honestly believe in such nonsense!” I exclaimed.

“Of course not!” He shook his head and laughed. “You know damn well I’m too profoundly sceptical to believe in anything. I have merely outlined a poet’s reactions to the universe. If a man wishes to write ghostly stories and actually convey a sensation of horror to his miserable and unworthy readers he must believe in everything—and *anything*. By *anything* I mean the horror that transcends *everything*, that is more terrible and impossible than *everything*. He must believe that there are things from outer space that can reach down and suck us dry.”

“But this thing from outer space—how can he describe it if he doesn’t know its shape or size or color?”

“It is virtually impossible to describe it. That is what I have sought to do—and failed. Perhaps some day—but then, I doubt if it can ever be accomplished. But your artist can hint, suggest—”

“Suggest what?” I asked, a little puzzled.

“Suggest a horror that is utterly unearthly; that makes itself felt in terms that have no counterparts on this earth.

“There is something prosaic,” he said, “about even the best of the classic tales of mystery and terror. Old Mrs. Radcliffe with her hidden vaults and bleeding ghosts, Maturin with his allegorical, Faust-like hero-villains, and his fiery flames from the mouth of hell, Edgar Poe with his blood-clotted corpses, and black cats, his tell-tale hearts and disintegrating Valdemars, Hawthorne with his amusing preoccupation with the problems and horrors arising from mere human sin (as though human sins were of any significance to the things that suck at our brains),



and the modern masters, Algernon Blackwood who invites us to a feast of the high gods and shows us an old woman with a harelip sitting before a ouija board fingering soiled cards, or an absurd nimbus of ectoplasm emanating from some clairvoyant ninny, Bram Stoker with his vampires and werewolves, mere conventional myths, the tag-ends of medieval folk-lore, Wells with his pseudo-scientific bogies, fish-men at the bottom of the sea, ladies in the moon, and the hundred and one idiots who are constantly writing ghost stories for the magazines—what have they contributed to the literature of the unholy?

“Are we not made of flesh and blood? It is but natural that we should be revolted and horrified when we are shown that flesh and blood in a state of corruption and decay, with the worms passing over and under it. It is but natural that a story about a corpse should thrill us, fill us with fear and horror and loathing. Any fool can awake these emotions in us—Poe really accomplished very little with his Lady Ushers, and liquescent Valdemars. He appealed to simple, natural, understandable emotions, and it was inevitable that his readers should respond.

“Are we not the descendants of barbarians? Did we not once dwell in tall and sinister forests, at the mercy of beasts that rend and tear? It is but inevitable that we should shiver and cringe when we meet in literature dark shadows from our own past. Harpies and vampires and werewolves—what are they but magnifications, distortions of the great birds and bats and ferocious dogs that harassed and tortured our ancestors? It is easy enough to arouse fear by such means. It is easy enough to frighten men with the flames at the mouth of hell, because they are hot and shrivel and burn the flesh—and who does not understand and dread a fire? Blows that kill, fires that burn, shadows that horrify because their substances lurk evilly in the black corridors of our inherited memories—I am weary of the writers who would terrify us by such pathetically obvious and trite unpleasantness.”



Real indignation blazed in his eyes.

“Suppose there were a greater horror? Suppose evil things from some other universe should decide to invade this one? Suppose we couldn’t see them? Suppose we couldn’t feel them? Suppose they were of a color unknown on the earth, or rather, of an *appearance* that was without color?

“Suppose they had a shape unknown on the earth? Suppose they were four-dimensional, five-dimensional, six-dimensional? Suppose they were a hundred-dimensional? Suppose they had no dimensions at all and yet existed? What could we do?

“They would not exist for us? They would exist for us if they gave us pain. Suppose it was not the pain of heat or cold or any of the pains we know, but a new pain? Suppose they touched something besides our nerves—reached our brains in a new and terrible way? Suppose they made themselves felt in a new and strange and unspeakable way? What could we do? Our hands would be tied. You cannot oppose what you cannot see or feel. You cannot oppose the thousand-dimensional. *Suppose they should eat their way to us through space!*”

He was rapidly talking himself into a frenzy.

“That is what I have tried to write about. I wanted to put into a story the crawling, formless thing that sucks at our brains. I wanted to make my readers, absurd and unworthy fools, feel and see that thing from another universe, from beyond space. I could easily enough hint at it, or suggest it—any fool can do that—but I wanted to actually describe it. To describe a color that is not a color! A form that is formless.

“A mathematician could perhaps slightly more than suggest it. There would be strange curves and angles that an inspired mathematician in a wild frenzy of calculation might glimpse vaguely. It is absurd to say that mathematicians have not discovered the fourth dimension. They have often glimpsed it, often approached it, often ap-



prehended it, but they are unable to demonstrate it. I know a mathematician who swears that he once saw the sixth dimension in a wild flight into the sublime skies of the differential calculus.

"Unfortunately I am not a mathematician. I am only a poor fool of a creative artist, and the thing from outer space utterly eludes me."

Someone was pounding loudly on the door. I crossed the room and drew back the latch. "What do you want?" I asked. "What is the matter?"

"Sorry to disturb you, Frank," said a familiar voice, "but I've got to talk to someone."

I recognized the lean, white face of my nearest neighbor, and stepped instantly to one side. "Come in," I said. "Come in, by all means. Howard and I have been discussing ghosts, and the things we've conjured up aren't pleasant company. Perhaps you can argue them away."

I called Howard's horrors ghosts because I didn't want to shock my commonplace neighbor. Henry Wells was immensely big and tall, and as he strode into the room he seemed to bring a part of the night with him.

He collapsed on a sofa and surveyed us with frightened eyes. Howard laid down the story he had been reading, removed and wiped his glasses, and frowned. He was more or less intolerant of my bucolic visitors. We waited for perhaps a minute, and then the three of us spoke almost simultaneously.

"A horrible night!"

"Beastly, isn't it?"

"Wretched."

Henry Wells frowned. "Tonight," he said, "I—I met with a funny accident. I was driving Hortense through Mulligan Wood—"

"Hortense?" Howard interrupted.

"His horse," I explained impatiently. "You were returning from Brewster, weren't you, Henry?"

"From Brewster, yes," he replied. "I was driving be-



tween the trees watching the fog curling in and out of Hortense's ears and listening to the foghorns in the bay wheezing and moaning, when something wet landed on my head. 'Rain,' I thought. 'I hope the supplies keep dry.'

"I turned round to make sure that the butter and flour were covered up, and something soft like a sponge rose up from the bottom of the wagon and hit me in the face. I snatched at it and caught it between my fingers.

"In my hands it felt like jelly. I squeezed it, and moisture ran out of it down my wrists. It wasn't so dark that I couldn't see it, either. Funny how you can see in fogs—they seem to make the night lighter. There was a sort of brightness in the air. I dunno, maybe it wasn't the fog, either. The trees seemed to stand out. You could see them sharp and clear. As I was saying, I looked at the thing, and what do you think it looked like? Like a piece of raw liver. Or like a calf's brain. Now that I come to think of it, it was more like a calf's brain. There were grooves in it, and you don't find any grooves in liver. Liver's usually as smooth as glass.

"It was an awful moment for me. 'There's someone up in one of those trees,' I thought. 'He's some tramp or crazy man or fool and he's been eating liver. My wagon frightened him and he dropped it—a piece of it. I can't be wrong. There was no liver in my wagon when I left Brewster.'

"I looked up. You know how tall all of the trees are in Mulligan Wood. You can't see the tops of some of them from the wagonroad on a clear day. And you know how crooked and queer-looking some of the trees are.

"It's funny, but I've always thought of them as old men—tall old men, you understand, tall and crooked and very evil. I've always thought of them as wanting to work mischief. There's something unwholesome about trees that grow very close together and grow crooked.

"I looked up. At first I didn't see anything but the tall trees, all white and glistening with the fog, and above them



a thick, white mist that hid the stars of heaven. And then something long and white ran quickly down the trunk of one of the trees.

"It ran so quickly down the tree that I couldn't see it clearly. And it was so thin anyway that there wasn't much to see. But it was like an arm. It was like a long, white and very thin arm. But of course it wasn't an arm. Who ever heard of an arm as tall as a tree? I don't know what made me compare it to an arm, because it was really nothing but a thin line—like a wire, a string. I'm not sure that I saw it at all. Maybe I imagined it. I'm not even sure that it was as wide as a string. But it had a hand. Or didn't it? When I think of it my brain gets dizzy. You see, it moved so quickly I couldn't see it clearly at all.

"But it gave me the impression that it was looking for something that it had dropped. For a minute the hand seemed to spread out over the road, and then it left the tree and came towards the wagon. It was like a huge white hand walking on its fingers with a terribly long arm fastened to it that went up and up until it touched the fog, or perhaps until it touched the stars of heaven.

"I screamed and slashed Hortense with the reins, but the horse didn't need any urging. She was up and off before I could throw the liver, or calf's brain or whatever it was, into the road. She raced so fast she almost upset the wagon, but I didn't draw in the reins. I'd rather lie in a ditch with a broken rib than have a long, white hand squeezing the breath out of my throat.

"We had almost cleared the wood and I was just beginning to breathe again when my brain went cold. I can't describe what happened in any other way. My brain got as cold as ice inside my head. I can tell you I was frightened.

"Don't imagine I couldn't think clearly. I was conscious of everything that was going on about me, but my brain was so cold I screamed with the pain. Have you ever held a piece of ice in the palm of your hand for as long as two



or three minutes? It burned, didn't it? Ice burns worse than fire. Well, my brain felt as though it had lain on ice for hours and hours. There was a furnace inside my head, but it was a cold furnace. It was roaring with raging cold.

"Perhaps I should have been thankful that the pain didn't last. It wore off in about ten minutes, and when I got home I didn't seem to be any worse for my experience. I'm sure I didn't think I was any the worse until I looked at myself in the glass. Then I saw the hole in my head."

Henry Wells leaned forward and brushed back the hair from his right temple.

"Here is the wound," he said. "What do you make of it?" He tapped with his fingers beneath a small round opening in the side of his head. "It's like a bullet wound," he elaborated, "but there was no blood and you can look in pretty far. It seems to go right in to the center of my head. I shouldn't be alive."

Howard had risen and was staring at my neighbor with flaming eyes.

"Why have you lied to us?" he shouted. "Why have you told us this absurd story? A long hand, forsooth! You were drunk, man, drunk—and yet you've succeeded in doing what I'd have sweated blood to accomplish. If I could have made my idiotic readers feel that horror, know it for a moment, that horror you described in the woods, I should be with the immortals—I should be greater than Poe, greater than Hawthorne. And you—a clumsy clown, a lying yokel—"

I was on my feet with a furious protest.

"He's not lying," I said. "The man's insane with fever. He's been shot—someone has shot him in the head. Look at his wound. My God, man, you have no call to insult him!"

Howard's wrath died and the fire went out of his eyes. "Forgive me," he said. "You can't imagine how badly I've wanted to capture that ultimate horror, to put it on paper, and he did it so easily. If he had warned me that he was



going to describe something like that I would have taken notes. But of course he doesn't know he's an artist. It was an accidental *tour de force* that he accomplished; he couldn't do it again, I'm sure. I'm sorry I went up in the air—I apologize. Do you want me to go for a doctor? That is a bad wound."

My neighbor shook his head. "I don't want a doctor," he said. "I've seen a doctor. There's no bullet in my head—that hole was not made by a bullet. When the doctor couldn't explain it I laughed at him. I hate doctors. And I haven't much use for fools that think I'm in the habit of lying. I haven't much use for people who won't believe me when I tell 'em I saw the long, white thing come sliding down the tree as clear as day."

But Howard was examining the wound in defiance of my neighbor's indignation. "It was made by something round and sharp," he said. "It's curious, but the flesh isn't torn. A knife or bullet would have torn the flesh, left a ragged edge."

I nodded, and was bending to study the wound when Wells shrieked and clapped his hands to his head. "Ah-h-h!" he choked. "It's come back—the terrible, terrible cold."

Howard stared. "Don't expect me to believe such nonsense!" he exclaimed disgustedly.

But Wells was holding on to his head and dancing about the room in a delirium of agony. "I can't stand it!" he shrieked. "It's freezing up my brain. It's not like ordinary cold. It isn't. Oh, God! It's like nothing you've ever felt. It bites, it scorches, it tears. It's like acid."

I laid my hand upon his shoulder and tried to quiet him, but he pushed me aside and made for the door.

"I've got to get out of here," he screamed. "The thing wants room. My head won't hold it. It wants the night—the vast night. It wants to wallow in the night."

He threw back the door and disappeared into the fog.



Howard wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat and collapsed into a chair.

"Mad," he muttered. "A tragic case of manic-depressive insanity. Who would have suspected it? The story he told us wasn't conscious art at all. It was simply a nightmare-fugue conceived by the brain of a lunatic."

"Yes," I said, "but how do you account for the hole in his head?"

"Oh, that!" Howard shrugged. "He probably always had it—probably was born with it."

"Nonsense," I said. "The man never had a hole in his head before. Personally, I think he's been shot. Something ought to be done. He needs medical attention. I think I'll phone Dr. Smith."

"It is useless to interfere," said Howard. "That hole was *not* made by a bullet. I advise you to forget him until tomorrow. His insanity may be temporary; it may wear off; and then he'd blame us for interfering. It doesn't pay to meddle with lunatics. If he's still crazy tomorrow, if he comes here again and tries to make trouble, you can notify the proper authorities. Has he ever acted queerly before?"

"No," I said. "He was always quite sane. I think I'll take your advice and wait. But I wish I could explain the hole in his head."

"The story he told interests me more," said Howard. "I'm going to write it out before I forget it. Of course I shan't be able to make the horror as real as he did, but perhaps I can catch a bit of the strangeness and glamor."

He unscrewed his fountain pen and began to cover a harmless sheet of paper with curious jeweled phrases—unearthly phrases. I knew that in a moment the paper would become unholy. I knew that it would glow with an unhallowed light; that witchfires would flicker over it; strange shadows deepen all about it. From his brain strange and monstrous ideas would flow in a continuous stream to the smooth, white paper.

I shivered and closed the door.



For several minutes there was no sound in the room save the scratching of his pen as it moved across the paper. For several minutes there was silence—and then the shrieks commenced. Or were they wails?

We heard them through the closed door, heard them above the moaning of the foghorns and the wash of the waves on Mulligan's Beach. We heard them above the million sounds of night that had horrified and depressed us as we sat and talked in that fog-enshrouded and lonely house. We heard them so clearly that for a moment we thought they came from just outside the house. It was not until they came again and again—long, piercing wails—that we discovered in them a quality of remoteness. Slowly we became aware that the wails came from far away, as far away, perhaps, as Mulligan Wood.

"A soul in torture," muttered Howard. "A poor, damned soul in the grip of crawling chaos."

He rose unsteadily to his feet. His eyes were shining and he was breathing heavily.

I seized his shoulder and shook him. "You shouldn't project yourself into your stories that way," I exclaimed. "Some poor chap is in distress. I don't know what's happened. Perhaps a ship has foundered. I'm going to put on a slicker and find out what it's all about. I have an idea we may be needed."

"We *may* be needed," repeated Howard slowly. "We may be needed indeed. It will not be satisfied with a single victim. Think of that great journey through space, the thirst and dreadful hungers it must have known! It is preposterous to imagine that it will be content with a single victim!"

Then, suddenly, a change came over him. The light went out of his eyes and his voice lost its quaver. He shivered.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm as mad as the yokel who was here a few minutes ago. But I can't help identifying myself with my characters when I write. I'd described something very evil, and those yells—



well, they are exactly like the yells a man would make if—if—”

“I understand,” I interrupted, “but we’ve no time to discuss that now. There’s a poor chap out there”—I pointed vaguely toward the door—“with his back against the wall. He’s fighting off something—I don’t know what. We’ve got to help him.”

“Of course, of course,” he agreed and followed me into the kitchen.

Without a word I took down a slicker and handed it to him. I also handed him an enormous rubber hat.

“Get into these as quickly as you can,” I said. “The chap’s desperately in need of us.”

I had gotten my own slicker down from the rack and was forcing my arms through its sticky sleeves. In a moment we were both pushing our way through the fog.

The fog was like a living thing. Its long fingers reached up and slapped us relentlessly on the face. It curled about our bodies and ascended in great, greyish spirals from the tops of our heads. It retreated before us, and as suddenly closed in and enveloped us.

Dimly ahead of us we saw the lights of a few lonely farms. Behind us the sea drummed, and the fog horns sent out a continuous, mournful ululation. The collar of Howard’s slicker was turned up over his ears, and from his long nose moisture dripped. There was grim decision in his eyes, and his jaw was set.

For many minutes we plodded on in silence, and it was not until we approached Mulligan Wood that he spoke.

“If necessary,” he said, “we shall enter the wood.”

I nodded. “There is no reason why we should not enter the wood,” I said. “It isn’t a large wood.”

“One could get out quickly.”

“One could get out very quickly indeed. My God, did you hear that?”

The shrieks had grown horribly loud.

“He is suffering,” said Howard. “He is suffering terribly.



Do you suppose—do you suppose it's your crazy friend?"

He had voiced a question which I had been asking myself for some time.

"It's conceivable," I said. "But we'll have to interfere if he's as mad as that. I wish I'd brought some of the neighbors with me."

"Why in heaven's name didn't you?" Howard shouted. "It may take a dozen men to handle him." He was staring at the tall trees that towered before us, and I don't think he really gave Henry Wells so much as a thought.

"That's Mulligan Wood," I said. I swallowed to keep my heart from rising to the top of my mouth. "It isn't a big wood," I added idiotically.

"Oh, my God!" Out of the fog there came the sound of a voice in the last extremity of unutterable pain. "They're eating up my brain. Oh, my God!"

I was at that moment in deadly fear that I might become as mad as the man in the woods. I clutched Howard's arm.

"Let's go back," I shouted. "Let's go back at once. We were fools to come. There is nothing here but madness and suffering and perhaps death."

"That may be," said Howard, "but we're going on."

His face was ashen beneath his dripping hat, and his eyes were thin blue slits. Before the tremendous challenge of his courage I was abashed.

"Very well," I said grimly. "We'll go on."

Slowly we moved among the trees. They towered above us, and the thick fog so distorted them and merged them together that they seemed to move forward with us. From their twisted branches the fog hung in ribbons. Ribbons, did I say? Rather were they snakes of fog—writhing snakes with venomous tongues and leering, evil eyes. Through swirling clouds of fog we saw the scaly, gnarled boles of the trees, and every bole resembled the twisted body of an evil old man. Only the small oblong of light cast by my electric torch protected us against their malevolence.

Through great banks of fog we moved, and every mo-



ment the screams grew louder. Soon we were catching fragments of sentences, hysterical shoutings that merged into prolonged wails. "Colder and colder and colder . . . they are eating up my brain. Colder! Ah-h-h!"

Howard gripped my arm. "We'll find him," he said. "We can't turn back now."

When we found him he was lying on his side. His hands were clasped about his head, and his body was bent double, the knees drawn up so tightly that they almost touched his chest. He was silent. We bent and shook him, but he made no sound.

"Is he dead?" I choked out the question hysterically. I wanted desperately to turn and run. The trees were very close to us.

"I don't know," said Howard. "I don't know. I hope that he is dead."

I saw him kneel and slide his hand under the poor devil's shirt. For a moment his face was a mask. Then he got up quickly and shook his head.

"He is alive," he said. "We must get him into some dry clothes as quickly as possible."

I helped him. Together we lifted the bent figure from the ground and carried it forward between the trees. Twice we stumbled and nearly fell, and the creepers tore at our clothes. The creepers were little malicious hands grasping and tearing under the malevolent guidance of the great trees. Without a star to guide us, without a light except the little pocket lamp which was growing dim, we fought our way out of Mulligan Wood.

The droning did not commence until we had left the wood. At first we scarcely heard it, it was so low, like the purring of gigantic engines far down in the earth. But slowly, as we stumbled forward with our burden, it grew so loud that we could not ignore it.

"What is that?" muttered Howard, and through the wraiths of fog I saw that his face had a greenish tinge.



"I don't know," I mumbled. "It's something horrible. I never heard anything like it. Can't you walk faster?"

So far we had been fighting familiar horrors, but the droning and humming that rose behind us was like nothing that I had ever heard on earth. In excruciating fright, I shrieked aloud. "Faster, Howard, faster! For God's sake, let's get out of this!"

As I spoke, the body that we were carrying squirmed, and from its cracked lips issued a torrent of gibberish: "I was walking between the trees and looking up. I couldn't see their tops. I was looking up, and then suddenly I looked down and the thing landed on my shoulders. It was all legs—all long, crawling legs. It went right into my head. I wanted to get away from the trees, but I couldn't. I was alone in the forest with the thing on my back, in my head, and when I tried to run, the trees reached out and tripped me. It made a hole so it could get in. It's my brain it wants. Today it made a hole, and now it's crawled in and it's sucking and sucking and sucking. It's as cold as ice and it makes a noise like a great big fly. But it isn't a fly. And it isn't a hand. I was wrong when I called it a hand. You can't see it. I wouldn't have seen or felt it if it hadn't made a hole and got in. You almost see it, you almost feel it, and that means that it's getting ready to go in."

"Can you walk, Wells? Can you walk?"

Howard had dropped Wells' legs and I could hear the harsh intake of his breath as he struggled to rid himself of his slicker.

"I think so," Wells sobbed. "But it doesn't matter. It's got me now. Put me down and save yourselves."

"We've got to run!" I yelled.

"It's our one chance," cried Howard. "Wells, you follow us. Follow us, do you understand? They'll burn up your brain if they catch you. We're going to run, lad. Follow us!"

He was off through the fog. Wells shook himself free, and followed with hoarse shrieks. I tasted a horror more



terrible than death. The noise was dreadfully loud; it was right in my ears, and yet for a moment I couldn't move. I stared at the blank wall of fog, and gibbered.

"God! Frank will be lost!" It was the voice of Wells, my poor, lost friend.

"We'll go back!" It was Howard shouting now. "It's death, or worse, but we can't leave him."

"Keep on," I shouted. "They won't get me. Save yourselves!"

In my anxiety to prevent them from sacrificing themselves I plunged wildly forward. In a moment I had joined Howard and was clutching at his arm.

"What is it?" I cried. "What have we to fear?"

The droning was all about us now, but no louder.

"Come quickly or we'll be lost!" he urged frantically. "They've broken down all barriers. That buzzing is a warning. We're sensitives—we've been warned, but if it gets louder we're lost. They're strong near Mulligan Wood, and it's here they've made themselves felt. They're experimenting now—feeling their way. Later, when they've learned, they'll spread out. If we can only reach the farm—"

"We'll reach the farm!" I shouted encouragement as I clawed my way through the fog.

"Heaven help us if we don't!" moaned Howard.

He had thrown off his slicker, and his seeping wet shirt clung tragically to his lean body. He moved through the blackness with long, furious strides. Far ahead we heard the maniacal shrieks of Henry Wells. Ceaselessly the fog horns moaned; ceaselessly the fog swirled and eddied about us.

And the droning continued. It seemed incredible that we should ever have found a way to the farm in the blackness. But find the farm we did, and into it we stumbled with glad cries.

"Shut the door!" shouted Howard.

I shut the door.



"We are safe here, I think," he said. "They haven't reached the farm yet."

"What has happened to Wells?" I gasped, and then I saw the wet tracks leading into the kitchen.

Howard saw them too. His eyes flashed with momentary relief.

"I'm glad he's safe," he muttered. "I feared for him."

Then his face darkened. The kitchen was unlighted and no sound came from it.

Without a word Howard walked across the room and into the darkness beyond. I sank into a chair, flicked the moisture from my eyes and brushed back my hair, which had fallen in soggy strands across my face. For a moment I sat, breathing heavily, and when the door creaked, I shivered. But I remembered Howard's assurance: "They haven't reached the farm yet. We're safe here."

Somehow, I had confidence in Howard. He realized that we were threatened by a new and unknown horror, and in some occult way he had grasped its limitations.

I confess, though, that when I heard the screams that came from the kitchen, my faith in my friend was slightly shaken. There were low growls, such as I could not believe came from any human throat, and the voice of Howard raised in wild expostulation. "Let go, I say! Are you quite mad? Man, man, we have saved you! Don't, I say—leggo my leg. Ah-h!"

As Howard staggered into the room I sprang forward and caught him in my arms. He was covered with blood from head to foot and his face was ashen.

"He's gone raving mad," he moaned. "He was running about on his hands and knees like a dog. He sprang at me, and almost killed me. I fought him off, but I'm badly bitten. I hit him in the face—knocked him unconscious. I may have killed him. He's an animal—I had to protect myself."

I laid Howard on the sofa and knelt beside him, but he scorned my aid.



"Don't bother with me!" he commanded. "Get a rope, quickly, and tie him up. If he comes to, we'll have to fight for our lives."

What followed was a nightmare. I remember vaguely that I went into the kitchen with a rope and tied poor Wells to a chair; then I bathed and dressed Howard's wounds, and lit a fire in the grate. I remember also that I telephoned for a doctor. But the incidents are confused in my memory, and I have no clear recollection of anything until the arrival of a tall, grave man with kindly and sympathetic eyes and a presence that was as soothing as an opiate.

He examined Howard, nodded and explained that the wounds were not serious. He examined Wells, and did not nod. He explained slowly that Wells was desperately ill. "Brain fever," he said. "An immediate operation will be necessary. I tell you frankly, I don't think we can save him."

"That wound in his head, Doctor," I said. "Was it made by a bullet?"

The doctor frowned. "It puzzles me," he said. "Of course it was made by a bullet, but it should have partially closed up. It goes right into the brain. You say you know nothing about it. I believe you, but I think the authorities should be notified at once. Someone will be wanted for manslaughter, unless"—he paused—"unless the wound was self-inflicted. What you tell me is curious. That he should have been able to walk about for hours seems incredible. The wound has obviously been dressed, too. There is no clotted blood at all."

He paced slowly back and forth. "We must operate here—at once. There is a slight chance. Luckily, I brought some instruments. We must clear this table and—do you think you could hold a lamp for me?"

I nodded. "I'll try," I said.

"Good!"

The doctor busied himself with preparations while I debated whether or not I should phone for the police.



"I'm convinced," I said at last, "that the wound was self-inflicted. Wells acted very strangely. If you are willing, Doctor—"

"Yes?"

"We will remain silent about this matter until after the operation. If Wells lives, there would be no need of involving the poor chap in a police investigation."

The doctor nodded. "Very well," he said. "We will operate first and decide afterward."

Howard was laughing silently from his couch. "The police," he snickered. "Of what use would they be against the things in Mulligan Wood?"

There was an ironic and ominous quality about his mirth that disturbed me. The horrors that we had known in the fog seemed absurd and impossible in the cool, scientific presence of Dr. Smith, and I didn't want to be reminded of them.

The doctor turned from his instruments and whispered into my ear. "Your friend has a slight fever, and apparently it has made him delirious. If you will bring me a glass of water I will mix him an opiate."

I raced to secure a glass, and in a moment we had Howard sleeping soundly.

"Now then," said the doctor as he handed me the lamp. "You must hold this steady and move it about as I direct."

The white, unconscious form of Henry Wells lay upon the table that the doctor and I had cleared, and I trembled all over when I thought of what lay before me.

I should be obliged to stand and gaze into the living brain of my poor friend as the doctor relentlessly laid it bare. I should be obliged to stand and stare as the doctor cut and probed, and perhaps I should witness unmentionable things.

With swift, experienced fingers the doctor administered an anesthetic. I was oppressed by a dreadful feeling that we were committing a crime, that Henry Wells would have



violently disapproved, that he would have preferred to die. It is a dreadful thing to mutilate a man's brain. And yet I knew that the doctor's conduct was above reproach, and that the ethics of his profession demanded that he operate.

"We are ready," said Dr. Smith. "Lower the lamp. Carefully now!"

I saw the knife moving in his competent, swift fingers. For a moment I stared, and then I turned my head away. What I had seen in that brief glance made me sick and faint. It may have been fancy, but as I stared hysterically at the wall I had the impression that the doctor was on the verge of collapse. He made no sound, but I was almost certain that he had made some horrible, unspeakable discovery.

"Lower the lamp," he said. His voice was hoarse and seemed to come from far down within his throat.

His voice horrified me so that I was guilty of a great treachery. I lowered the lamp an inch without turning my head. I waited for him to reproach me, to swear at me perhaps, but he was as silent as the man on the table. I knew, though, that his fingers were still at work, for I could hear them as they moved about. I could hear his swift, agile fingers moving about the head of Henry Wells.

I suddenly became conscious that my hand was trembling. I wanted to lay down the lamp; I felt that I could no longer hold it.

"Are you nearly through?" I gasped in desperation.

"Hold that lamp steady!" The doctor screamed the command. "If you move that lamp again—I—I won't sew him up. I'll walk out of this room and leave his obscene brain to rot. I don't care if they hang me! I'm not a healer of devils!"

I knew not what to do. I could scarcely hold the lamp, and the doctor's threat horrified me. In desperation I pleaded with him.

"Do everything you can," I urged, hysterically. "Give



him a chance to fight his way back. He was kind and good—once!”

For a moment there was silence, and I feared that he would not heed me. I momentarily expected him to throw down his scalpel and sponge, and dash across the room and out into the fog. It was not until I heard his fingers moving about again that I knew he had decided to give even the damned a chance.

It was after midnight when the doctor told me that I could lay down the lamp. I turned with a cry of relief and encountered a face that I shall never forget. In three-quarters of an hour the doctor had aged ten years. There were purple caverns beneath his eyes, and his mouth twitched convulsively. There were wrinkles upon his high yellow forehead that I had not seen there before, and when he spoke, his voice was cracked and feeble.

“He’ll not live,” he said. “He’ll be dead in an hour. I did not touch his brain. I could do nothing. When I saw—how things were—I—I sewed him up immediately.”

“What did you see?” I half-whispered.

A look of unutterable fear came into the doctor’s eyes. “I saw—I saw”—his voice broke and his whole body quivered—“I saw—oh, the burning shame of it! Because I have seen a—what man should not look upon—I bear the mark of the beast upon me. I am contaminated for ever. I am unclean. I cannot stay in this house. I must leave at once.”

He broke down and covered his face with his hands. Great sobs convulsed his body.

“Unclean,” he moaned. “The old, hideous secret that man has forgotten—a horror to look upon. Evil that is without shape; evil that is formless.”

Suddenly he raised his head and looked wildly about him.

“They will come here and claim him!” he shrieked. “They have laid their mark upon him and they will come



for him. You must not stay here. This house is marked for destruction!"

I watched him helplessly as he seized his hat and bag and crossed to the door. With white, shaking fingers he drew back the latch, and in a moment his lean figure was silhouetted against a square of swirling vapor.

"Remember that I warned you!" he shouted back; and then the fog swallowed him.

Howard was sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"A malicious trick, that!" he was muttering. "To deliberately drug me! Had I known that glass of water——"

"How do you feel?" I asked as I shook him violently by the shoulders. "Do you think you can walk?"

"You drug me, and then ask me to walk! Frank, you're as unreasonable as an artist. What is the matter now?"

I pointed to the silent figure on the table. "Mulligan Wood is safer," I said. "He belongs to them now!"

Howard sprang to his feet and shook me by the arm.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "How do you know?"

"The doctor saw his brain," I explained. "And he also saw something that he would not—could not describe. But he told me that they would come for him, and I believe him."

"We must leave here at once!" cried Howard. "Your doctor was right. We are in deadly danger. Even Mulligan Wood—but we need not return to the wood. There is your launch!"

"There is the launch!" I echoed, faint hope rising in my mind.

"The fog will be a most deadly menace," said Howard grimly. "But even death at sea is preferable to *this* horror."

It was not far from the house to the dock, and in less than a minute Howard was seated in the stern of the launch and I was working furiously on the engine. The fog horns still moaned, but there were no lights visible anywhere in the harbor. We could not see two feet before our faces. The white wraiths of the fog were dimly visible in the



darkness, but beyond them stretched endless night, lightless and full of terror.

Howard was speaking. "Somehow I feel that there is death out there," he said.

"There is more death here," I said as I churned at the engine. "I think I can avoid the rocks. There is very little wind and I know the harbor."

"And of course we shall have the fog horns to guide us," muttered Howard. "I think we had better make for the open sea."

I agreed.

"The launch wouldn't survive a storm," I said, "but I've no desire to remain in the harbor. If we reach the sea we'll probably be picked up by some ship. It would be sheer folly to remain where they can reach us."

"How do we know how far they can reach?" groaned Howard. "What are the distances of earth to things that have traveled through space? They will overrun the earth. They will destroy us all utterly."

"We'll discuss that later," I cried as the engine roared into life. "We're going to get as far away from them as possible. Perhaps they haven't *learned* yet! While they've still limitations we may be able to escape."

We moved slowly into the channel, and the sound of the water splashing against the sides of the launch soothed us strangely. At a suggestion from me Howard had taken the wheel and was slowly bringing her about.

"Keep her steady," I shouted. "There isn't any danger until we get into the Narrows!"

For several minutes I crouched above the engine while Howard steered in silence. Then, suddenly, he turned to me with a gesture of elation.

"I think the fog's lifting," he said.

I stared into the darkness before me. Certainly it seemed less oppressive, and the white spirals of mist that had been continually ascending through it were fading into insubstantial wisps. "Keep her head on," I shouted. "We're in



luck. If the fog clears we'll be able to see the Narrows. Keep a sharp lookout for Mulligan Light."

"Let me have the wheel," I shouted as I stepped quickly forward. "This is a ticklish passage, but we'll come through now with flying colors."

In our excitement and elation we almost forgot the horror that we had left behind us. I stood at the wheel and smiled confidently as we raced over the dark water. Quickly the rocks drew nearer until their vast bulk towered above us.

"We shall certainly make it!" I cried.

But no response came from Howard. I heard him choke and gasp.

"What is the matter?" I asked suddenly, and turning, saw that he was crouched in terror above the engine. His back was turned towards me, but I knew instinctively in which direction he was gazing.

The dim shore that we had left shone like a flaming sunset. Mulligan Wood was burning. Great flames shot up from the highest of the tall trees, and a thick curtain of black smoke rolled slowly eastward, blotting out the few remaining lights in the harbor.

But it was not the flames that caused me to cry out in a frenzy of fear and horror. It was the shape that towered above the trees, the vast, formless shape that moved slowly to and fro across the sky.

God knows I tried to believe that I saw nothing. I tried to believe that the shape was a mere shadow cast by the flames. I even managed to laugh, and I remember that I patted Howard's arm reassuringly.

"The wood will be destroyed utterly," I cried. "I know that they will not escape. They will all perish."

But when Howard turned in his fright and screamed, I knew that the dim, formless thing that towered above the trees was more than a shadow.

"If we see it clearly we are lost!" he shrieked. "Pray that it remains without form!"



"I see nothing!" I groaned. "There is blackness above the trees."

"It has no form," gibbered Howard. "We should not—we must not see it! It is our little brains that give it a form. When it enters our brains it becomes clothed in a form. If it enters our brains we are lost."

"The woods are burning!" I shouted. "There is nothing above the trees. All is blackness and emptiness above the trees."

But even as I stared at the shape with loathing, with furious disbelief, it grew more distinct. Above the burning trees it hovered awfully, and I slowly became aware that it had wings.

"It is like a bat!" I groaned. "It is a great bat with yellow wings brooding over the fire."

"It is a bat!" sobbed Howard. "It is dark and very large and almost formless, but it is a bat!"

"No, no!" I shrieked. "It is not a bat. We see nothing. There is a great vague form that moves back and forth above the trees, but it is not a bat."

Howard buried his head in his hands and sobbed aloud in an agony of fear. "Our brains will grow cold," he moaned. "They will enter and suck at our brains."

"Oh, not that!" I cried. "I will die first. I will throw myself into the water. That terror is more terrible than drowning."

We stood trembling in the darkness, a prey to the most awful horror. The shape above Mulligan Wood was slowly growing clearer and I did not think anything could save us. And then, suddenly, I remembered that there was one thing that might save us.

"It is older than the world," I thought, "older than all religion. Before the dawn of civilization men knelt in adoration before it. It is present in all mythologies. It is the primal symbol. Perhaps, in the dim past, thousands and thousands of years ago, it was used to—repel the invaders.



I shall so use it. I shall fight the shape with a high and terrible mystery."

I became suddenly curiously calm. I knew that I had hardly a minute to act, that more than our lives were threatened, but I did not tremble. I reached calmly beneath the engine and drew out a quantity of cotton waste.

"Howard," I said, "I want you to light me a match. It is our only hope. You must strike a match at once."

For what seemed eternities Howard stared at me incomprehensibly. Then the night was clamorous with his laughter.

"A match!" he shrieked. "A match to warm our little brains! Yes, we shall need a match."

"Trust me!" I entreated. "You must—it is our one hope. Strike a match quickly."

"I do not understand!" Howard was sober now, but his voice quivered hysterically.

"I have thought of something that may save us," I said. "Please light this waste for me."

Slowly he nodded. I had told him nothing, but I knew he guessed what I intended to do. Often his insight was uncanny. With fumbling fingers he drew out a match and struck it.

"Be bold," he said. "Show them that you are unafraid. Make the sign boldly."

As the waste caught fire, the form above the trees stood out with a frightful clarity.

"There is nothing there," I cried. "We see nothing. We are protected. We are invincible."

I raised the flaming cotton and passed it quickly before my body in a straight line from my left to my right shoulder. Then I raised it to my forehead and lowered it to my knees.

In an instant Howard had snatched the brand and was repeating the sign. He made two crosses, one against his body and one against the darkness with the torch held at



arm's length. "*Sanctus . . . sanctus . . . sanctus*," he muttered.

For a moment I shut my eyes, but I could still see the shape above the trees. Then slowly it ceased to resemble a bat, its form became less distinct, became vast and chaotic—and when I opened my eyes it had vanished. I saw nothing but the flaming forest and the shadows cast by the tall trees.

The horror had passed, but I did not move. I stood like an image of stone staring over the black water. Then something seemed to burst in my head. My brain spun dizzily, and I tottered against the rail.

I would have fallen, but Howard caught me about the shoulders. "We're saved!" he shouted. "We've won through."

"I'm glad," I said. But I was too utterly exhausted to really rejoice. My legs gave way beneath me and my head fell forward. All the sights and sounds of earth were swallowed up in a merciful blackness.

Howard was writing when I entered the room.

"How is the story going?" I asked.

For a moment he ignored my question. Then he slowly turned and faced me. His lips opened but no sound came from between them. I noticed that he had aged horribly. He was much thinner (I don't think he weighed more than one hundred and ten pounds) and there were myriads of tiny wrinkles about his eyes.

"It's not going well," he said at last. "It doesn't satisfy me. There are problems that still elude me. I haven't been able to capture *all* of the crawling horror of the thing in Mulligan Wood."

I sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I want you to explain that horror to me," I said. "For three weeks I have waited for you to speak. I know that you have some knowledge which you are concealing from me. What was the damp, spongy thing that landed on



Wells' head in the woods? Why did we hear a droning as we fled in the fog? What was the meaning of the shape that we saw above the trees? And why, in heaven's name, didn't the horror spread as we feared it might? What stopped it? Howard, what do you think really happened to Wells' brain? Did his body burn with the farm, or did they—*claim* it? And the other body that was found in Mulligan Wood—that lean, blackened horror with riddled head—how do you explain that?" (Two days after the fire a skeleton had been found in Mulligan Wood. A few fragments of burned flesh still adhered to the bones, and the skull cap was missing.)

It was a long time before Howard spoke again. He sat with bowed head, fingering his notebook, and his body trembled horribly, trembled all over. At last he raised his eyes. They shone with a wild light and his lips were ashen.

"Yes," he said. "We will discuss the horror together. Last week I did not want to speak of it. It seemed too awful to put into words. But I shall never rest in peace until I have woven it into a story, until I have made my readers feel and see that dreadful, unspeakable thing. And I cannot write of it until I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that I understand it myself. It may help me to talk about it.

"You have asked me what the damp thing was that fell on Wells' head. I believe that it was a human brain—the essence of a human brain drawn out through a hole, or holes, in a human head. I believe the brain was drawn out by imperceptible degrees, and reconstructed again by the horror. I believe that for some purpose of its own it used human brains—perhaps to learn from them. Or perhaps it merely played with them. The blackened, riddled body in Mulligan Wood? That was the body of the first victim, some poor fool who got lost between the tall trees. I rather suspect the trees helped. I think the horror endowed them with a strange life. Anyhow, the poor chap lost his brain. The horror took it, and played with it, and then ac-



cidentally dropped it. It dropped it on Wells' head. Wells said that the long, thin and very white arm he saw was looking for something that it had dropped. Of course Wells didn't really see the arm objectively, but the horror that is without form or color had already entered his brain and clothed itself in human thought.

"As for the droning that we heard and the shape we thought we saw above the burning forest—that was the horror seeking to make itself felt, seeking to break down barriers, seeking to enter our brains and clothe itself with our thoughts. It almost got us. If we had seen the shape as clearly as Wells saw the white arm we should have been lost."

Howard walked to the window. He drew back the curtains and gazed for a moment at the crowded harbor and the colossal buildings that towered against the moon. He was staring at the skyline of lower Manhattan. Sheer beneath him the cliffs of Brooklyn Heights loomed darkly.

"Why didn't they conquer?" he cried. "They could have destroyed it utterly. They could have wiped it from the earth—all its incredible wealth and power would have gone down before them. The great buildings would have toppled into the sea, and millions of brains would have fed their lust—their terrible, unearthly lust."

I shivered. "But why didn't the horror spread?" I cried.

Howard shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know. Perhaps they discovered that human brains were too trivial and absurd to bother with. Perhaps we ceased to amuse them. Perhaps they grew tired of us. But it is conceivable that the *sign* destroyed them—or sent them back through space. I think they came once before. I think they came millions of years ago, and were frightened away by the sign. When they discovered that we had not forgotten the use of the sign they may have fled in terror. Certainly there has been no manifestation for three weeks. I think that they are gone."

"Then I have saved the world!" I shouted exultantly.



"Perhaps." He eyed me disapprovingly. "I think I can forgive you for that," he said, "but it is nothing to gloat over."

"And Henry Wells?" I asked.

"Well, his body was not found. I imagine they came for him."

"And you honestly intend to put this—this ultimate obscenity into a story. Oh, my God! The whole thing is so incredible, so unheard of, that I can't believe it. I can't! My friend, my friend, did we not dream it all? Were we ever really in Partridgeville? Did we sit in an ancient house and discuss unmentionable things while the fog curled about us? Did we walk through that unholy wood? Were the trees really alive, and did Henry Wells run about on his hands and knees like a wolf?"

Howard sat down quietly and rolled up his sleeve. He thrust his thin arm toward me.

"Can you argue away that scar?" he said. "There are the marks of the beast that attacked me—the man-beast that was Henry Wells. A dream? My friend, I would cut off this arm immediately at the elbow if you could convince me that it was a dream."

I walked to the window and remained for a long time staring at the stupendous galaxies of Manhattan. "There," I thought, "is something substantial. It is absurd to imagine that anything could destroy it. It is absurd to imagine that the horror was really as terrible as it seemed to us in Partridgeville. I must persuade Howard not to write about it. We must both try to forget it."

I returned to where he sat and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"You'll give up the idea of putting it into a story?" I urged gently.

"Never!" He was on his feet, and his eyes were blazing. "Do you think I would give up now when I've almost captured it? I shall write the most terrible story that the world has ever seen. My readers shall crouch and whimper in



awful fear. I shall surpass Poe—I shall surpass all of the Masters.”

“Surpass them and be damned then,” I said angrily. “That way madness lies, but it is useless to argue with you. Your egoism is too colossal.”

I turned and walked swiftly out of the room. It occurred to me as I descended the stairs that I had made an idiot of myself with my fears, but even as I went down I looked fearfully back over my shoulder, as though I expected a great stone weight to descend from above and crush me to the earth. “He should forget the horror,” I thought. “He should wipe it from his mind. He will go mad if he writes about it.”

Three days passed before I saw Howard again.

“Come in,” he said in a curiously hoarse voice when I knocked on his door.

I found him in dressing gown and slippers, and I knew as soon as I saw him that he was terribly exultant. His eyes shone and he greeted me with a feverish intensity.

“I have triumphed, Frank!” he cried. “I have reproduced the form that is formless, the burning shame that man has not looked upon, the crawling, fleshless obscenity that sucks at our brains!”

Before I could so much as gasp he had placed the bulky manuscript in my hands.

“Read it, Frank,” he commanded. “Sit down at once and read it!”

I crossed to the window and sat down on the lounge. I sat there oblivious to everything but the typewritten sheets before me. I confess that I was consumed with an unholy curiosity. I had never questioned Howard’s power. With words he wrought miracles; breaths from the unknown blew always over his pages, and things that had passed beyond earth returned at his bidding. But could he even suggest the horror that we had known?—could he even so much as hint at the loathsome, crawling thing that had claimed the brain of Henry Wells?



I read the story through. I read it slowly, and clutched at the pillows beside me in a frenzy of loathing. As soon as I had finished it Howard snatched it from me. He evidently suspected that I desired to tear it to shreds.

"What do you think of it?" he cried exultantly.

"It is indescribably foul!" I exclaimed. "It is terribly, unspeakably obscene!"

"But you will concede that I have made the horror convincing?"

I nodded, and reached for my hat. "You have made it so convincing that I cannot remain and discuss it with you. I intend to walk until morning. I intend to walk until I am too weary to care, or think, or remember."

"It is deathless art!" he shouted at me, but I passed down the stairs and out of the house without replying.

It was past midnight when the telephone rang. I laid down the book I was reading and lowered the receiver.

"Hello. Who is there?" I asked.

"Frank, this is Howard!" The voice was strangely high-pitched. "Come as quickly as you can. *They've come back!* And Frank, the sign is powerless. I've tried the sign, but the droning is getting louder, and a dim shape—" Howard's voice trailed off disastrously.

I fairly screamed into the receiver. "Courage, man! Do not let them suspect that you are afraid. Make the sign again and again. I will come at once."

Howard's voice came again, more hoarsely this time. "The shape is growing clearer and clearer. And there is nothing I can do! Frank, I have lost the power to make the sign. I have forfeited all right to the protection of the sign. My soul is corrupt. I've become a priest of the Devil. That story—I should not have written that story."

"Show them that you are unafraid!" I cried.

"I'll try! I'll try! Ah, my God! The shape is—"

I did not wait to hear more. Frantically seizing my hat and coat I dashed down the stairs and out into the street.



As I reached the curb a dizziness seized me. I clung to a lamppost to keep from falling, and waved my hand madly at a fleeing taxi. Luckily the driver saw me. The car stopped and I staggered out into the street and climbed into it. "Quick!" I shouted. "Take me to 10 Brooklyn Heights!"

"Yes, sir. Cold night, ain't it?"

"Cold!" I shouted. "It will be cold indeed when they get in. It will be cold indeed when they start to—"

The driver stared at me in amazement. "That's all right, sir," he said. "We'll get you home all right, sir. Brooklyn Heights, did you say sir?"

"Brooklyn Heights," I groaned and collapsed against the cushions.

As the car raced forward I tried not to think of the horror that awaited me. I clutched desperately at straws. "It is conceivable," I thought, "that Howard has gone temporarily insane. How could the horror have found him among so many millions of people? It cannot be that *they* have deliberately sought him out. It cannot be that they would deliberately choose him from among such multitudes. He is too insignificant—all human beings are too insignificant. They would never deliberately angle for human beings. They would never deliberately trawl for human beings—but they did seek Henry Wells. And what did Howard say? 'I have become a priest of the Devil.' Why not *their* priest? What if Howard has become their priest on earth? What if his obscene, loathly story has made him their priest?"

The thought was a nightmare to me, and I put it furiously from me. "He will have courage to resist them," I thought. "He will show them that he is not afraid."

"Here we are, sir. Shall I help you in, sir?"

The car had stopped, and I groaned as I realized that I was about to enter what might prove to be my tomb. I descended to the sidewalk and handed the driver all the change that I possessed. He stared at me in amazement.



"You've given me too much," he cried. "Here, sir—"

But I waved him aside and dashed up the stoop of the house before me. As I fitted a key into the door I could hear him muttering, "Craziest drunk I ever seen! He gives me four bucks to drive him ten blocks, and doesn't want no thanks or nothin'—"

The lower hall was unlighted. I stood at the foot of the stairs and shouted. "I'm here, Howard! Can you come down?"

There was no answer. I waited for perhaps ten seconds, but not a sound came from the room above.

"I'm coming up!" I shouted in desperation, and started to climb the stairs. I was trembling all over. "They've got him," I thought. "I'm too late. Perhaps I had better not—great God, what was that?"

I was unbelievably terrified. There was no mistaking the sounds. In the room above, someone was volubly pleading and crying aloud in agony. Was it Howard's voice that I heard? I caught a few words indistinctly. "Crawling—ugh! Crawling—ugh! Oh, have pity! Cold and clee-ar. Crawling—ugh! God in heaven!"

I had reached the landing, and when the pleadings rose to hoarse shrieks I fell to my knees, and made against my body, and upon the wall beside me, and in the air—the sign. I made the primal sign that had saved us in Mulligan Wood, but this time I made it crudely, not with fire, but with fingers that trembled and caught at my clothes, and I made it without courage or hope, made it darkly, with a conviction that nothing could save me.

And then I got up quickly and went on up the stairs. My prayer was that they would take me quickly, that my sufferings should be brief under the stars.

The door of Howard's room was ajar. By a tremendous effort I stretched out my hand and grasped the knob. Slowly I swung it inward.

For a moment I saw nothing but the motionless form of Howard lying upon the floor. He was lying upon his back.



His knees were drawn up and he had raised his hands before his face, palms outward, as if to blot out a vision unspeakable.

Upon entering the room I had deliberately, by lowering my eyes, narrowed my range of vision. I saw only the floor and the lower section of the room. I did not want to raise my eyes. I had lowered them in self-protection because I dreaded what the room held.

I did not want to raise my eyes, but there were forces, hideous and obscene powers at work in the room which I could not resist. I knew that if I looked up, the horror might destroy me, but I had no choice.

Slowly, painfully, I raised my eyes and stared across the room. It would have been better, I think, if I had rushed forward immediately and surrendered to the thing that towered there. It would have consumed me in a moment, consumed me utterly, but what does life hold for me now? The vision of that fetid obscenity will come between me and the pleasures of the world as long as I remain in the world.

From the ceiling to the floor it towered, and it threw off drooling shafts of light. The light was slimy and unspeakable—a liquid light that dripped and dripped, like spittle, like the fetid mucous of loathsome slugs. And pierced by the shafts, whirling around and around, were the pages of Howard's story.

In the center of the room, between the ceiling and the floor, the pages whirled about, and the loathsome light burned through the sheets, and descending in dripping shafts entered—*the brain of my poor friend!* Into his head the light was pouring in a continuous stream, and above, the Master of the Light moved slowly back and forth, back and forth. And still the foul light drooled and oozed and ran and poured into the brain of my friend.

And then there came from the mouth of the Master a most awful sound. . . . I had forgotten the sign that I had made three times below in the darkness. I had forgotten



the high and terrible mystery before which all of the invaders were powerless. But when I saw it forming itself in the room, forming itself immaculately, with a terrible integrity above the drooling yellow light, I knew that I was saved.

I sobbed and fell upon my knees. The fetid light dwindled, and the Master shriveled before my eyes.

And then from the walls, from the ceiling, from the floor, there leapt flame—a white and cleansing flame that consumed, that devoured and destroyed for ever.

But my friend was dead.



## ***Grab Bags Are Dangerous***

SATTERLY picked up the coarse burlap sack which Tony the iceman was trying to sell him, and examined it critically. It was unsanitary, of course, and would have to be shaken out in the sunlight. But it seemed to be just the right size for a party grab bag.

Satterly was feeling sorry for himself. He was only thirty-two and a bachelor, but whenever he rigged himself up as the Night Before Christmas his youth seemed to slip away from him until he felt as old as Methuselah.

He could still hear Ellen giving him a sentimental pat on the back. "Darling, you should have seen those children's faces. *Your* Santa Claus isn't just department store."

All right, he was fond of children. He hoped some day to have a kid of his own. But, like all normal males, he resented having children forced on him. Ellen was simply taking advantage of his good nature and his dramatic talents.

She wanted him to wear a brown beard this time, and masquerade as Friar Tuck. She was having a summer birthday party for her kid sister, and—"Ted, a pillow case would be too small. Couldn't you pick up an old burlap bag somewhere?"



He had mumbled something deep in his throat which had sounded a little like "Um, I'll try."

Now he was sorry she wasn't beside him so that he could turn to her and ask, "How's this?"

Tony was giving him a persuasive sale talk, but he wasn't sure he liked the bag.

"For five cents where could you find a better bag?" Tony was saying. "I'm asking you, where?"

"You're sure it won't tear?"

Tony frowned and flicked a hand over the rough burlap. "It will not tear. It is strong, see?"

Gripping a fold of the bag, he jerked at its seams with his fingers. "See?"

"Okay," Satterly said. "Here's your nickel."

Five minutes later he was walking homeward along a quiet suburban street, the sack under his arm and his mind irrelevantly disturbed by the look of relief which had come into the Italian's face when his sweaty palm had closed over a chiseled Indian head.

Tony was a chiseler, all right. That bag hadn't cost him a cent. He was simply a shrewd—

Satterly's thoughts congealed. Something was nuzzling his ankle as he walked, something cold and moist. Abruptly he stopped walking.

The nuzzling was encircling his ankle now, but he was sure that it was just a tic. A neuralgic twitching in his ankle muscles would feel like that—like something cold nuzzling him. He was sure that if he looked down he would feel all right about it.

Why was he afraid to look down? It was silly as hell, in broad daylight, a block from his lodgings. He shuddered and tugged at his collar band. Feeling all the revulsion of a man who has been asked to look into an open grave, he lowered his gaze to the pavement.

For a moment it seemed that they could not be dogs. They were crouching all about him, their bared fangs



gleaming in the sunlight, and their wolfish eyes riveted on  
—on—

He thought at first they were glaring up into his face. When he took a slow step backward the hair bristled along their backs, and they arched their bodies as if they were about to spring upon him and sink their teeth in his flesh.

Sweat broke out on him when he realized that they were staring up at the bag under his arm. He realized that the instant the slavering jaws of a big police dog closed with a crunch a foot from his face.

The dog's teeth had missed the bag by a scant half inch. It flopped back on its haunches and growled savagely, its gums flecked with froth.

All the dogs in the neighborhood seemed to be crouching at Satterly's feet. Even as he stared others came loping towards him, their nostrils quivering.

Satterly was breathing harshly when he arrived at his lodgings. He had saved the bag by holding it aloft and beating a hasty retreat. He hadn't hoped to find the front door of Mrs. Kildaire's rooming house ajar, but for once luck favored him. Before the dogs could turn in from the street and stream howling across the lawn, he was inside the house with the bag still intact.

He had no memory of shutting the door, only of pulling out a handkerchief, mopping his brow, and ascending to his room on the third floor on automatic feet.

That had been a close call, all right. He might have been mangled!

"Why, Ted, how pale you look," Ellen said. She stood in the doorway of the summer house, looking cool and lovely, a Blue Danube something in the set of her hair and the low-cut evening dress which she was wearing with the moonlight at her back.

He was tantalizingly aware of her cool fragrance even before he took her in his arms. He kissed her with the sack under his arm, wishing that he had fallen in love with a less



strong-willed woman, even if that meant getting worked up over a girl with a harelip.

"Darling, I brought all the presents out here. I want you to be a complete surprise. You look exactly like Friar Tuck."

"I look like a brown Santa Claus," Satterly said. "Friar Tuck was smooth-shaven, if I remember my Robin Hood."

"Never mind. Children aren't as critical as all that."

"When I was a kid historical anachronisms drove me nuts."

"You were not a normal child in a good many ways, Ted."

Satterly sighed and showed her the sack. "What do you think of this? It ought to hold thirty or forty presents."

Ellen's eyes lit up. "Oh, you sweet," she said, and kissed him again.

He wondered why her lips always smelled of lilacs and old lace, although she never used perfume and a kiss was supposed to be odorless.

"You can help me fill the bag," she said. "I didn't want the children to eavesdrop, so I brought all of the gifts out to the summer house."

"I get it. You want me to be a surprise."

"Ted, what is the matter with you tonight? You don't have to jump all over me. I'm just trying to bring a little happiness into the lives of—"

"I'm sorry," Satterly said. "It's just that—well, my nerves are all shot. I've been working too hard on my damned play, I guess—sweating all morning over two lines of dialogue that won't jell."

"You poor dear," she said.

"I've a neat twist at the end of the second act, but I can't get it to jell. What I really need is a vacation. Last night I had a dream that could only mean one thing—I'm teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown."

"You did, Ted?"

"It was an ugly, mildewed sort of dream. Cobwebs and



spiders and everything not nice. Before I woke up something ghastly came close—so close that its breath fanned my face.”

“You mean you wanted to run and couldn’t?”

Satterly shook his head. “It’s hard to explain how I felt. I was terrified, but I didn’t want to run. I could have lifted the sack, but I didn’t want to do that either.”

“You could have lifted off the *sack*?”

Satterly nodded. “My head and shoulders were inside this bag.”

Ellen looked at him askance. “Ted, sometimes I wish you were a more prolific writer. If you could bat out plays the way some writers do, you wouldn’t have time for nervous breakdowns. Why should you dream about this sack?”

“I’d rather not talk about it, Ellen—not tonight. I’m not even sure that it *was* a dream.”

“But—”

“This is supposed to be a kids’ party, Ellen, and my dream had ‘not for children’ stamped all over it.”

“I’m not a child, Ted.”

“I know, but it might spoil your evening.”

“Don’t be like that, Ted. I’m not squeamish.”

“Well, I was dog-tired and thought I would drift right off into a dreamless sleep. But all I did was toss and turn until a voice began whispering that I could never, never sleep.

“It was a cracked-record kind of voice, raucous, metallic, going round and round, and breaking off when the needle struck the crack, if you get what I mean.”

“I think I do.”

“This is how it went: ‘Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack—get up and get under if you don’t you won’t—won’t—won’t—won’t—ever sleep, get up and—get under the sack—sack—sack—sack.’ ”

Ellen shivered. “You were asleep already, of course.”



"I'm not sure. I actually got out of bed, and pulled the sack down over my body to my waist."

"You actually—"

"Got out of bed, yes. When I awakened I was standing by the window breathing through the bag. I could have lifted it off in the dream, but awake I was paralyzed. I was in total darkness, and the bag smelled like dead flesh. I went reeling back against the dresser, clawing at it, and finally—I got it off. It was still dark in the room, but the dawn was beginning to break outside the window, and I knew that—"

"Ted, you haven't told me about the dream itself."

"I'm not sure it *was* a dream, Ellen. Part of the time I may have been awake. But until I smelled that dead-flesh odor I was certainly in an abnormal state, because the bag itself, the fact that I was inside, didn't terrify me.

"It was what I saw that made my flesh crawl. Perhaps I should say—*didn't see*. All I could make out at first was a confused blur—a sort of flowing greyness. The voice had stopped, but there were sounds inside the bag which I didn't like any better. Somewhere in the greyness were faint rustlings and cracklings such as a mouse might make scampering over dry leaves in a forest. Or a mole might make, burrowing inside a hollow log and throwing up dry leaves and dirt.

"I thought I could smell damp, moldy earth, but I could have been mistaken about that. Mingled with the forest feeling was an old-house feeling. I mean, there were moments when I seemed to feel blank walls about me, walls unpierced by windows or even ventilator shafts.

"A time passed and the greyness began to thin a little. White lines formed before my face, criss-crossed and became—spider webs.

"I closed my eyes, but I couldn't shut out the spider. It was clinging to one of the strands, and its image seemed to burn through my eyelids into my brain. It was lumpish and hairy and huge, but the worse thing about it was its



stickiness. It moved logily across the web, leaving a trail of sticky ichor in its wake.

"I could tell the ichor was sticky without touching it. When I opened my eyes again there were five spiders, moving up, down and across the web, and a tall shape was coming toward me through the greyness.

"It was then I had that feeling I told you about. I didn't *want* to pull the sack off. Don't get the idea I wasn't frightened. Black horror was clutching at my throat, but I didn't want to run. I wanted to see the face of that shape. The nearer it came the more it seemed to merge with the greyness. It had a face, but I couldn't tell you now whether it was human or not. It was clad in a flowing white robe and had a sort of turban on its head. But it could not have had an entirely human look, or I would not have been so terrified."

"What happened then?" Ellen whispered.

"I woke up—with an odor of dead flesh in my nostrils."

Ellen shuddered. "Couldn't you have kept all that to yourself? You've spoiled my evening."

It was on the tip of Satterly's tongue to retort: "You asked for it," but he restrained himself. Ellen was dear, sweet, lovely, adorable and kind, and this was her evening which he had spoiled. He felt like a brute.

She said, "I'm glad the children didn't hear you. Things like that should be kept from children."

He had forgotten about the children completely. The children. He was Friar Tuck, and the bag would have to be filled quickly now.

"Let's put in the presents," he said. "Here, you hold the sack."

They spent a pleasant five minutes filling the sack. Pleasant to Satterly because when he bent over Ellen's hair brushed his face, and pleasant to Ellen because she enjoyed making children happy, and was, of course, glad that her strong, big, handsome, if somewhat neurotic, playwriting



fiancé was helping to make her sister's birthday party a success.

Trooping across the lawn in the moonlight with Ellen at his side, Satterly felt almost young again, despite the beard which descended to his waist, and the paunch which he had constructed by stuffing a pillow under his brown mendicant's costume.

There were fifteen children in bathing suits sitting in moonlight at the edge of the swimming pool on the back lawn of Ellen's big, white, rambling, eighteenth-century house. They ranged in years from seven to fourteen, and what adorable children they were.

Two of the boys, nine and eleven respectively, were twisting the pigtails of two of the girls, seven and ten, and three of the other boys were getting ready to gang up on the rest of the girls and throw them into the pool from the high springboard overhead. Satterly could tell by the way they were whispering together that their big moment was just around the bend.

Sitting in a split-bamboo garden chair on a green cushion was Miss Constiner. Miss Constiner loved children, too. Whenever there were birthday parties for children Miss Constiner could be seen sitting with the little dears. Never standing—sitting. Miss Constiner weighed two hundred and eighty pounds, and had given up dieting in her youth. She was a kindly, well-intentioned woman, and subconsciously Satterly liked her.

It was Miss Constiner who saw Satterly first. She arose excitedly, her avoirdupois quivering, and waddled towards him, a beaming expression on her face.

"Oh, how wonderful," she exclaimed. "Friar Tuck! You are Friar Tuck, aren't you? And you've gifts for all our little sweets in that bag."

Satterly glanced at Ellen, and was pained to see a gratified smile spread across her face. Little sweets!

"I'm just dying with curiosity, Mr. Sat—I mean, Friar Tuck. Just what have you got in that bag? Toys? Is there



anything for grownups in your wonderful bag, Friar Tuck?"

Ellen said, "Of course there is, Lucy. Gertrude's friends are not selfish. Sharing with others is half the—"

"Oh, how thoughtful. You mean there are presents for our little sweets' parents in Friar Tuck's bag, too?"

"Of course, Lucy. Wouldn't you like to try your luck? If you get a doll, you can exchange it for something adult."

"That's sweet of you, dear. I think I will see what I can draw out of Friar Tuck's wonderful bag."

Satterly started to protest, but was silenced by a look from Ellen which said as plain as words: "Keep your cynicism under your hat. Lucy will get a great kick out of this."

There was a sudden screeching from beside the swimming pool. The children had espied Satterly simultaneously and were racing towards him across the lawn, their bare feet pattering on the grass.

"Presents! Boy, oh, boy! Stay back, I saw him first."

"Jackie Powers, you get outa my way. Y'wanta getcha face pushed in?"

"Oh, dear," sighed Miss Constiner. "I'm afraid the children will think me very selfish."

Satterly felt, somehow, that Miss Constiner's well-intentioned sloppings-over were on a higher plane than the sheer savagery of the children.

He sighed and extended the bag. "Take your pick, Miss Constiner. I hope you get something really worth while. If it's a refrigerator, I'll help you lift it out."

Miss Constiner giggled. She raised a fat hand and went exploring, so deeply that even her dimpled elbow went slithering down into a depths of the bag. For a moment she foraged about, a look of rapturous anticipation on her face.

"There are so many bundles it's hard to—"

"Take a little one, Lucy," Ellen prompted. "Most of the adult gifts are small. I thought that pen-and-pencil sets—"



"Now don't tell me, Ellen. I want to be surprised."

Miss Constiner got her wish. She screamed so loudly that even the children froze.

"Something bit me," she shrieked, whipping out her hand and recoiling backward across the lawn. "An animal! Oh, Ellen, how could you?"

Satterly turned pale. He lowered the bag to the lawn, and grabbed Miss Constiner's wrist before she could sink back into her chair, and burst into hysterical tears.

She tried to jerk free, her bosom heaving. "Let go of me, Mr. Satterly. You have a cruel and horrible sense of humor. To put a live animal with sharp teeth into that bag, to expose those little darlings to—"

"Hold steady for just one second, Miss Constiner," Satterly pleaded. "I want to look at your hand. You can cut yourself badly on paper, you know."

"I didn't cut myself. Something bit me. I could feel its wet mouth."

Despite Miss Constiner's tuggings Satterly succeeded in twisting her wrist around. Ellen heard him suck in his breath sharply.

"What is it, dear? A scratch?"

Nothing at all! On Miss Constiner's palm were the unmistakable marks of—*of teeth*. Something had bitten Miss Constiner viciously on the hand, and left eight gleaming indentations which could not be concealed.

*Which could not be concealed.* Satterly knew that he would have to think fast if Ellen was to be spared the full, ghastly impact of a horror that would certainly do something to her mind. Having told her about his dream, she was in no position to stand up to it the way he could with his adrenals working overtime from strain.

Satterly was a fast thinker when he had to be. Pulling out a handkerchief, he wrapped it around Miss Constiner's hand. "You'd better put some iodine on that right away," he said. "With a rusty knife you can't be too careful."

Miss Constiner began to tremble. "A rusty knife—"



"There were some pocket knives in that bag," lied Satterly. "The automatic kind, with press buttons on the side. One of them must have snapped open."

Ellen started to protest, but Satterly silenced her by pinching her arm.

Miss Constiner looked Ellen up and down, her eyes flashing. "Ellen, I thought you had better sense. If those children cut themselves, how will you feel, knowing that you—oh, Ellen."

A moment later Miss Constiner's waddling bulk was a receding blur in the moonlight, and Ellen was facing Satterly with a stamping-foot look in her eyes.

"Why did you lie to her?" she demanded. "You've made her think I'm the kind of woman who should never have a child of her own."

"She was getting on my nerves," Satterly said. "If I hadn't thrown a scare into her, she would have asked you to bandage that little scratch, and stayed right on. That's all it was—a little, trivial scratch. She's have spoiled Gertrude's birthday party."

"Spoiled Gertrude's party! Do you imagine you haven't done that?"

Ellen turned and ran so swiftly into the house that it was difficult for Satterly to realize that she had left him alone with the children.

It was especially difficult because of the horror in his mind. In the sack lurked something ghastly, something *ghastly* which made his immediate surroundings seem remote, unreal.

He *was* sure, now. The dogs had known. Dogs loved scents, lived for scents. Their lives were enriched by odors beyond human comprehension which they knew how to savor to the utmost. But in the sack was something ghastly which had lifted their harls, and given them no pleasure at all.

Yet they *had* sensed it—the thing which he had seen in his dream.



Ellen's little sister was clutching at his sleeve. Ellen's sister, Gertrude, dear, sweet child. How he wished that she would go away.

"Can we have our presents now, Mr. Satterly? Can we? Can we? Can we, Mr. Satterly?"

"Friar Tuck," he muttered. "I am supposed to be Friar Tuck."

"You can't fool us, Mr. Satterly. Can we have our presents now?"

Far off somewhere a cracked phonograph record that was really a horrible voice had begun to turn. "Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack—get up and get under if you don't you won't—won't—won't—ever truly rest—get up and—get under the sack—sack—sack."

He clutched the stone bench under him and stared down at the sack, which was lying on the wet grass where he had left it.

It was surrounded by children now, who were eyeing it covetously, who were circling around it like little jungle beasts.

"Can we have our presents now, Mr. Satterly? Jimmy, you get outa my way. I saw it first."

"Yeah? You and who else?"

He felt like a child, too. That is to say, deep in his mind he felt just as savage and rude. And frightened—no sensitive child left alone in a big, old house at midnight by thoughtless modern parents could have felt more completely at the mercy of things unseen.

An icy band encircled his skull and his heart was a solid lump of ice which dripped, dripped, dripped. It didn't beat at all, but just dripped, like an old cistern leaking in an empty house at midnight.

"Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack—if you don't you won't—"

Ellen's sister had long, golden curls and a stubborn chin which was set firmly now. "Mr. Satterly, please. Can we have our presents?"



Presents? The sack was full of presents, so why was he experiencing that awful sense of helplessness, of impending disaster? He couldn't pull the sack down over his head because it was bulging with presents. The joke was on that damned, horrible voice. It couldn't compel him to do something that was physically impossible. Two solid bodies couldn't occupy the same space at the same time. Even those savage children knew that.

One of the twelve-year-olds reached out suddenly, grabbed the sack and held it up in the moonlight. "What-cha gonna give me for this, Gertrude? You wanta play post office?"

Satterly got lurchingly to his feet. "Just a minute, you little ape. *Put that sack down.*"

The youngster dropped the sack and leaped back with a startled cry, and the rowdyism damped out of him by the glaring fury on Satterly's face.

Satterly shook his head as though to clear it, and moved to where the sack was lying. He picked it up. The youngster had twirled it about so that he had to tug at the burlap before there was room for his hand to reach down inside.

Standing grimly in the moonlight he went exploring, precisely as Miss Constiner had done. On the outside the sack still bulged as though it were filled with packages. But inside his hand encountered—*nothing at all*.

Nothing for quite a full minute. Nothing while cold sweat broke out on his forehead and ran in rivulets down his face.

Suddenly there was something there. Not favors, but some thing. His fingers tangled in a wilderness of hair, and moved slowly across a moist surface that felt soggy to the touch.

Close your eyes and put your hand on somebody's face. How does it feel? That's the way it felt to Satterly, only soggier.

The features were not composed. They squirmed beneath his palm—squirmed and twisted horribly. It didn't



seem to have any eyes—just empty sockets lined with cold, moist flesh.

Satterly's face had gone as white as the belly of a dead fish. The hair was damp, clinging. It seemed to have a peculiar, repellent life of its own. Satterly had the awful feeling that the strands were about to twine themselves about his fingers and draw them tightly against a wet blubbery mouth that wanted to *gnaw on his flesh*. With a choking sob of utter revulsion he whipped his hand out, and stood trembling.

“Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack—get up and get under if you don't you won't—won't—won't—ever rest—get up and get—”

The cracked voice stopped abruptly, stopped completely, and then—began again. Began again with a deeper, more sepulchral intonation, as though someone had slipped a new record on a phonograph.

“Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack—get up and get under so that I may feast—feast—feast—and grow strong—strong—strong—and grow fat—fat—fat; get up and get under the sack—sack—sack.”

Suddenly Satterly knew that he could not fight against the voice or cheat it in any way. He was being summoned and must obey. There was a compulsion in every syllable of the voice which he could not fight.

Far off amidst ancient night and chaos a record that never was on sea or land was turning, turning, turning—But, of course, it wasn't a record. It was the greedily beckoning voice of something not quite human, something leprous and tainted that wanted to feast—feast—feast—and grow—fat—fat—fat—get up and get under the sack—sack—sack.

Golden-haired Gertrude's jaw was still firm. She came up and tugged at the bag. “Please, Friar Tuck, we want our presents.”

The clever little minx. She was trying to cajole him by



accepting his disguise, as though he could be flattered even now.

"My dear child," he wanted to scream at her. "When a man is being lowered into the earth, when his eyes are about to be filled with rheumy matter, you cannot reach him in that way. He is beyond vanity, beyond hope, beyond all the little sillinesses of—"

"Get up and get under the sack—sack—sack."

Satterly smiled, as a man will when he knows for certain that he is about to die, and is amused despite himself by the antics of his executioner.

How could he get up when he was not lying down? The moon had come out from under a cloud, and the swimming pool was bathed in a silvery refulgence. Satterly looked up at the trees, the stars that he would miss, and thought also of Ellen. A dull lump came into his throat. She was strong-willed and her mind was not as keen as his, but she—she was the brightest light his life had ever known.

It would be awful when that light went out. He raised the sack suddenly, and shook it so that all the presents fell out upon the lawn.

There was the sound of smitten flesh, as the children started scrambling for the largest and most promising-looking packages, boys and girls together, shouting, scratching, kicking—

Satterly scarcely saw them. Slowly he raised the sack, and pulled it down over his body to his waist. He not only felt like a condemned man now—he looked like one. The scaffold was a lawn where children romped, and the noose was a film of greyness flowing—

He saw it coming towards him through the greyness almost at once. It was carrying its turban now, and he could see its face clearly. It had a flat little horrible nose and pointed ears—

Satterly screamed.

"Darling, darling, darling."



He seemed to be coming out of a sea where bubbles were arising, dancing, bursting with a plop high above his head. Coming up out of a sea to a raft which was floating on fleecy white clouds, pulling himself up with dripping arms to—

“Darling, can you ever forgive me? I ran off and left you when you needed me most.”

His faculties were steadying now. Things which had seemed strange and terrifying were resolving themselves into quite commonplace objects in the guest room of Ellen’s big, white house.

His arms *were* dripping, but not with sea water. He was simply drenched with perspiration from head to toe. The bubbles were motes dancing in moonlight by a window which looked out upon the branches of a familiar tree. The raft was the ceiling overhead, and the clouds bas-relief cupids cavorting above the mantel on the opposite side of the room.

Ellen was sitting on the edge of the bed with a glass of aromatic spirits in her hand. “Darling, I just didn’t realize how worked up you were, how badly you needed a rest. I should have known you’d pull that awful sack down over your head again.”

It was coming back now. Horribly. He began to shiver.

“I’ll never forgive myself, darling. If Tony hadn’t torn the sack off—”

Satterly sat up so suddenly that Ellen was nearly bounced off the bed. “Tony? What was Tony doing here?”

“He came for that sack. Hassin Ali wanted it back.”

“*Hassin Ali?*”

Ellen nodded. “He was living in the back of Tony’s shop. He paid Tony two dollars a week for a horrible little hole of a room that only an Arab could live in. Tony felt sorry for him. He was working down at the mine, but last week they laid him off, and he had to economize. All he had were the clothes on his back and that . . . that awful sack.”



"You mean Tony sold me a *stolen* sack?"

"Yes. Tony just didn't—like the sack."

"I don't wonder."

"Hassin Ali was furious when he found out. He threatened to kill himself. He made Tony phone your landlady, and, of course, Mrs. Kildaire told him where you were. When Tony found you, you were lying on the lawn in a dead faint, with the sack over your head. If Tony hadn't ripped it off, you would have suffocated. Gertrude was just standing there smiling. Ted, it will be some time before she is able to sit down. I just couldn't help it—I saw red."

Satterly swabbed a perspiring brow. "Did Tony say why this Hassin Ali went haywire when he thought he had lost his sack?"

Ellen nodded. "Tony said that Hassin Ali had brought that sack all the way from Damascus. It had belonged to his grandfather. He said Hassin told him it was a *coal* sack. He said there was a coal in that sack. But, of course, Tony's grammar is pretty bad."

Satterly turned as white as a sheet. "No Ellen," he said. "Not his grammar. His pronunciation. He just can't pronounce goo as in *ghoul*."

"As in—"

"Ellen, can't you get me something stronger than this sissy drink. Aromatic spirits—"



## *Fisherman's Luck*

*Hermes—Divine messenger of the gods, identified by the Romans with Mercury. He was worshiped as a conductor of souls and of dreams. His staff was thought to possess magical properties, drawing treasures from the earth and summoning spirits from afar.*  
*Crabb's English Dictionary*

MASON was extremely proud of the fishing rod. It was slim and willowy, and as light as a zephyr. Mason liked to fish, but for five years no one had seriously considered his likes and dislikes. He was just good old Mason, a pillar of the community, and a fixture at Green & Hedges, where he was as indispensable as the business cycle chart on the wall of Green's office.

Green and the chart had kept him glued to his desk for five years. He could hear Green saying it now: "I'm sorry, Mason, but there will be no vacation for you *this* year. Just look at that chart. If conditions get any worse we'll have to cut expenses to the bone."

Without lifting a finger Green had saved the lives of two thousand trout. But Green wasn't a conservationist now. Standing beside Green's widow, Mason had watched them



lower the cold clay that had been Green six feet into the ground. She had wept and he had comforted her, a faithful employee at the last.

He was free to fish now. Hedges had steadfastly refused to take down the chart, but Green's widow was not one to be dictated to.

"You'll do as I say, Mr. Hedges. Poor Mr. Mason gets a vacation this year. He's done more for the concern than you."

It was true, of course. Mason had done a great deal for the concern. Even if Hedges didn't think so, even if Mrs. Green had to take up the cudgels in his behalf.

The brook in which he was standing was alive with trout. He was standing immersed to his knees, his tall rubber boots arising like ebon pillars from the racing water. He raised his rod and flicked a golden, spun-silk fly gracefully out over the stream, bracing himself as he did so.

He had bought the rod in New York City. Walking down Maiden Lane he had espied it in a pawnbroker's window and had purchased it swiftly on impulse. He could still hear the clerk saying, "Yeah, it's a swell rod. Light as a feather. You couldn't buy a rod like that new for less than thirty bucks."

The fly alighted on a churning eddy and was carried swiftly downstream. He watched it pass from view behind a bend in the bank, his eyes squinting against the sun. Just around that bend was a deep, dark pool overhung with heavy foliage.

Something was tugging on his line. The pull was leaden, but insistent. It was the exact opposite of what he had hoped for. No sudden, violent jerk, but simply a dull resistance at the end of his line, as though he had ensnared a dead log in the depths of the pool.

His rod bent, quivered. He moved out into the center of the stream, holding his net in readiness. Slowly he began reeling the line in.

He saw it before it bobbed around the bend and swirled



towards him on the surface of the water. The foliage thinned a little at the extremity of the pool and he caught a sudden glimpse of it between green leaves.

He became ill instantly. Sweat poured out over his body and his stomach twisted in horror. For a merciful instant the foliage hid it from view. Then it bobbed around the bend and he saw it clearly.

Swirling towards him through the dark water was a sallow human face, oriental in cast, with high cheekbones and a tightly knotted queue that sickened Mason quite as much as the filaments of mutilated flesh that clung to it. The queue was long, black and twisted and it writhed like a fresh-water eel, churning up the water behind the horror as Mason reeled it in. The filaments merely dangled, like maimed angleworms.

With violently shaking hands Mason unhooked the gruesome relic and dropped it into his creel. He clamped the lid down, stood trembling. His body now was drenched with sweat. Murder? It was murder, of course. Someone had decapitated a Chinaman and dropped the head into—wait, wait. There was a sawmill somewhere in the vicinity. An industrial accident could not be ruled out.

Mason was sure of only one thing. He had stumbled on something ghastly which he must report at once. The sheriff of the township would know what steps to take.

White to the lips, he returned through the woods to the inn where he had spent the previous night. The long bar just off the main dining room was crowded with fishermen guests. Towards its mahogany sheen Mason gravitated unsteadily, his heart hammering against his ribs.

“A straight whisky, please,” he said.

The landlord himself was passing them out. He shoved a two-ounce glass in Mason’s direction, tilted an amber bottle, and beamed.

“Any luck today, brother?” he inquired.

Mason shook his head, drained his whisky at a gulp.

“Well now,” said the landlord. “That’s too bad.”



Mason shoved his glass forward. "Another please," he said.

Standing at Mason's elbow was a genial stout man with a red, perspiring face. He tapped Mason's shoulder. "I had the best of luck, Mr. M . . . Mason. Just look there."

He lifted the lid of his creel and showed Mason a bevy of speckled trout reposing on moist moss.

Mason said, "I guess I didn't pick the right spots."

"No? Where did you go, Mr. Mason?"

"I tried the deep pool at Mill Stream," he said.

The stout man chuckled. "No wonder you didn't get a bite. There's a jinx on that spot on account of the Chinaman."

Mason's jaw fell open. He swayed and clutched the bar rail, his shoulders jerking.

"You act surprised, Mr. Mason. How come you didn't hear about the jinx? It's been a standing joke in these parts for years."

"What about the Chinaman?" Mason gasped. "Was . . . was he murdered?"

"That's what the grandpops say. Fifty years ago this place was a virgin wilderness. There was some sort of lumber camp here. The chink did the cooking. He got into a fight with a white man and the white man cut his head off with a butcher's cleaver. Yeah, and dropped it into the Mill Stream. It was never found, they say. The Chinaman is supposed to haunt the stream day and night, looking for his head."

Above the bar was a mounted deer's head. Mason stared up at it, and shivered. He shivered because he saw in lieu of horns a pigtail standing straight up. The long, lugubrious, animal face was changing before his eyes into the mottled, sallow countenance of a long-dead Oriental.

He shook the terrifying illusion off, and turned from the bar, his features twitching. He went straight upstairs to his room, climbing the creaky wooden steps on automatic feet.

In the privacy of his room with his secret safeguarded by



a bolted door and drawn shades he felt a lot more secure immediately. Unstrapping the creel, he lowered it hastily to the floor. Reason kept insisting that it couldn't be the same Chinaman. Even if the Mill Stream had a high lime content such a miracle of preservation could not occur in nature.

An uneasy feeling was deepening in him that once he got into the law's clutches his goose would be cooked. They would say that he had heard about the jinx, brooded over it and gone stark, raving mad, killing another Chinaman to enhance the legend's lustre.

It was curious, but despite the terrible dread which enveloped him a triviality kept plucking at his nerves. He had a ritual to perform which could not be postponed. Shaking off horror, he picked up his fishing pole and carried it to the window. He raised the sash and leaned out, squinting into the sunset. Down below was a sprawling apple orchard enveloped in purple shadows, its outermost fringe of trees encroaching on the inn's lawn.

Every calling has its sacred obligations, its solemn rites. The fisherman who neglects to dry out his line loses caste, sinking in his own estimation and affronting Aquarius himself.

Mason had no intention of backsliding in that respect. The nearest of the apple trees had low-hanging limbs, which were exactly suited to his purpose. First he'd fasten a lead sinker to the end of his line and let it descend to the ground beneath his window. Then he'd go down and pick it up, and drape it around the apple tree. That way, the line would dry out high in the air and his reel wouldn't rust.

He didn't remove the fly, merely attached the sinker to the leader gut and thrust his pole out of the window. For the next ten seconds he seemed to be fishing from the window. There was no water down below. Merely earth, grass and buttercups. But a curious expectancy crept over him as the weighted line descended.

It was the queerest sensation. He did seem to be fishing.



And the tug was so imperceptible at first, that it blended with his mood, strengthening the illusion.

He awoke to terror suddenly. There was a convulsive jerk and the pole was nearly wrenched from his grasp. With a startled cry, he clamped his thumb on the reel, leaping back into the room. Instantly the tugging became convulsive, continuous. He had all he could do to hold on to the rod. He started to return to the window, then thought better of it.

If he was not to lose his pole, he needed elbow room. Why was he trembling so? There was nothing terrifying about his catch this time. It was either a sheep or a cow which had accidentally ensnared itself, and was now running out his line, plunging frantically away across the orchard.

Of a sudden, the line stopped unwinding. Scarcely daring to breathe, he began reeling it in. To his amazement, there was only a dull, leaden resistance now. For an instant his spine congealed and he envisaged another head, sinister, leering. But it wasn't another head that climbed up over the sill and descended lightly at his feet.

"You've nearly pulled my hair out," his catch said. "I struggled because you took me by surprise. I knew you would catch me some day. They said I went into the woods and disappeared. Perhaps I did. I was lost for hours and I could never remember what happened to me really."

She stood smilingly regarding him, her hair a shimmering golden glory. Her hair wasn't the only glorious thing about her. From her small feet to the crown of her head, she was miraculously endowed physically. She seemed to have stepped right out of an old daguerreotype. She was wearing hooped skirts, and a black satin bodice with flaring sleeves, and her waist tapered to a wasplike slimness. She was trying to get the hook out of her hair.

"It hurts when I tug at it," she complained. "Can't you do something?"

With trembling fingers he untangled the hook, staring



into her sapphire-blue eyes and feeling a sudden warmth rising through him. Her full red lips were smiling at him invitingly.

"I must have fallen asleep in the woods," she said. "I dreamed about you. You caught me and tugged, and I passed from my world into yours."

He was beginning to understand now. A suspicion of the truth was tugging at him as relentlessly as the horror had tugged in the dark, swirling Mill Stream. The horror in his creel. He had forgotten about the horror, but now it swept in upon him again, chilling him, driving the warmth from his body.

He stepped back from her, his lips twitching. "Tell me," he said, hoarsely. "When were you born?"

"In 1801," she said. "I am nineteen years old."

So now he knew. It was a magic rod. You fished with it, and caught people who had lived long ago. You caught *things*, too—soggy, dead things. He moaned, and pressed wet palms to his brow.

"We are living in a dream, aren't we?" the girl said. "The things you showed me were certainly unreal. A box with a human voice coming out of it—a woman's musical voice. You said the voice came from a real woman far away. You called it a *radio* voice. And the iron carriage we drove in was certainly something we dreamed about together."

Despite his agitation, it was borne in on him that she possessed a curious sort of foreknowledge. He had caught a girl who could look ahead into her own future. She remembered obscurely the blank in her life when she had been snatched up out of the past.

A sudden trembling seized him. It was about to happen again. It had to happen. You couldn't change the future when it backwashed into the past like that. She had spoken of an iron carriage. That would be a train, of course.

They were about to go away together. She had traveled about with him in a "dream" long ago, and then returned



into the past. He could feel the future plucking at him, planting his feet in the path he was destined to follow.

A strange giddiness was sweeping over him. He wanted to take her in his arms. There was no reason why he shouldn't. He was heartfree, and she was so lovely, so very lovely.

He paled suddenly, remembering the horror in his creel. He couldn't just leave the head here in his room. Someone would find it and raise a hue and cry. He'd have to take it with him.

She perceived how pale he was, and drew near to him. Her fingers caressed his cheeks, his hair.

"I knew the dream would come again," she said.

They didn't leave together. She slipped down the stairs ahead of him, crouched in shadows at the foot of the banisters and waited for the desk clerk to turn his back. The instant he did so, she darted wasplike, across the lobby, and out through a side door to the veranda of the hotel.

When Mason rejoined her, her hair was blowing in the wind and she was gazing up at the evening star. In the cool, scented dusk he clasped her slender body and kissed her lingeringly, his burden of horror forgotten.

"If we hurry, we can catch the seven-fifteen train," he said.

He was wearing the creel under his coat, but he said nothing to her about that as they trudged in silence, along a narrow dirt road with the twilight deepening about them.

They caught the train just as it was pulling out. He lifted her to the end platform, swung his bags up, and leaped aboard himself, the creel dangling from his hip.

Whether a man's personality can be split into divergent halves, one recognizably himself, the other a quivering bundle of terror and misery, is a problem difficult to decide. Certainly, the Mason who sat in a deserted smoking car ten minutes later with the creel on his lap, was curious-



ly unlike the Mason who had walked in the dusk with a girl from the past.

He had left her in the observation car, her hands clutching plush. He could still hear her pleading with him. "Don't go away. I fear this part of the dream. I fear it."

He had been reluctant to leave her, even for a moment. But he couldn't bear the thought of her and *it* together, on the same train.

The car was traveling beside a lake which reflected far, glimmering stars. The window beside him was wide open and he could smell the water, and the pines which fringed the lake, and wood smoke arising from the depths of the pines. It was very peaceful out there beyond the window of the car.

He opened the creel suddenly, thrust his hand in. The flesh of the horror was cold to his touch. Sweat broke out on him as his fingers explored its soggy contours. Utter terror seized him. He had the feeling that his heart was about to burst in his chest.

He must steel himself. He must. He could not take her in his arms while this grisly thing stood between them. How should he lift it out? Slip his fingers into the eye sockets, as though it was a bowling ball that he must heft and throw? Or grasp the dank pigtail—

The head seemed to twist about when his fingers plucked at it. He lifted it from the creel without looking at it. Grasping it firmly, he leaned from the window and hurled it straight out into the night.

The train was roaring around a bend, its long bulk twisting like a fire-breathing dragon. He saw the head go sailing out over the lake, saw it descend in a red flare from the cinder-belching locomotive.

He withdrew his head and shoulders quickly. He was trembling uncontrollably. He whipped out a handkerchief, mopped his damp brow. Thank heaven, it was gone from him. It was no longer an incubus weighing him down.

He placed the empty creel on the seat beside him, and



fumbled for a cigarette. His heart would stop hammering in a moment.

He didn't see it hovering just outside the window, its pigtail standing straight up, its dead, filmy eyes staring sightlessly in at him. But when it bobbed erratically over the sill, slithered across the seat and plopped back into the creel again, his pupils dilated and a scream strangled in his throat.

The lake had refused to accept it, and it had returned to roost. It was some time before he could shake off a convulsive trembling which threatened to hurl him into the aisle.

Perhaps it *was* a dream. From the very beginning. Had he really left Green & Hedges, traveled to the Catskills, fished in the Mill Stream and returned to New York again?

A dream? He pinched his flesh and stared down at the luggage which he had brought into the restaurant with him. Very substantial his bags looked—as substantial as the creel which now reposed on a chair between the girl and himself.

She was sipping her coffee and smiling at him like an innocent child. She did not know that they were not alone at the table. The straw creel seemed to become translucent suddenly. He saw the dank pigtail, coiled now around the soggy cheeks, the mottled flesh over the horror's cheekbones.

Opposite them a radio was blaring. The woman's musical voice that she had heard in her dream, had given place to raucous swing now.

Mason gasped suddenly. A familiar figure had entered the restaurant and was advancing towards his table.

Green's widow was a statuesque, blonde virago past her first youth, but despite the waning of her beauty, there was something about her which stirred the pulses of most males. Dressed now in red, her Amazonian charms heightened by rouge and a low-cut evening gown, she was the recipient of admiring glances as she advanced between the tables.



Her expression showed that she was furious. The fact that Mason had spurned the vacation she had won for him, returning unexpectedly, with a young and more attractive woman, was cruelly disillusioning. It made her feel degraded, it made her want to kill him.

She was hovering now directly before his table, glaring down at him.

"When did you get back?" she rasped. "And who is this young lady, may I ask?"

Mason's reaction was one of consternation. Although he had recommended the restaurant to Rhoda Green, he had never dreamed she would drop in for a snack in the small hours to find him dining with a young lady who was a complete stranger to her.

"Rhoda, I . . . I caught cold up there in the mountains," he stammered. "I felt so miserable, I decided not to remain."

Her gaze was withering. "So you've been to a costume party!"

"A costume party? I don't understand."

"Isn't this young lady wearing a costume? Don't tell me she was born in that dress."

The girl beside Mason stiffened. "My mother made this dress," she said. "I resent your slurs, madam."

Rhoda Green's face flamed scarlet. "Oh, you do, do you? Why, you little minx! You cheap little off-spring of a minx!"

Furiously, she stooped and slapped the girl's face.

Mason leaped up in consternation, gripped her wrist and twisted her around. "Rhoda, control yourself. That was shameful."

Rhoda seemed to become insane suddenly. She jerked her arm free, and snatched up Mason's creel. The hideous creel, the creel which cloaked all horror.

"*Your* costume, no doubt," she shrilled. "Stuffed in here. Did you go in the role of a harlequin?"

She opened the creel before Mason could snatch it from



her. Opened it, and screamed. The next instant, she was groping dizzily with her free hand in the air behind her. She must sit down, must find a chair. There was certainly a chair somewhere behind her. She was still waving her hand about when her senses left her, and she crashed to the floor in a dead faint.

No one troubled to keep Mason and the girl apart during the chilling drive from the restaurant to police headquarters. They sat side by side, in a Black Maria, Mason's arm about the girl's slim waist.

"You see how it is, Abigail," he said. "It wasn't a dream. This happened to you before. It didn't happen to me exactly, because I wasn't born when you came from the past into *now*, and met me."

"What will happen to us, dear?"

Mason's face was grim. "I'm afraid the police will be very brutal," he said. "They don't believe in magic. The third degree is—but you wouldn't know about that. It was before your time."

"You mean, they'll torture you?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm afraid they will."

They did. For six hours Mason sat in his shirt sleeves, his forehead beaded with sweat, his eyes drained dry in their sockets. The dazzle was frightful. If only they would take the blazing light away.

He had wanted a cigarette at first; now water was all he cared about. A glass of cold water bubbling, brimming—a cold spring bubbling.

They kept asking him why. "Why did you kill him? You killed him down in Chinktown, eh? Who was he? What was his name? Where's the rest of him? Why did you butcher him? C'mon, buddy, tell us why."

Mason's chief interrogator was a big, heavy-set man with steel-grey eyes which bulged towards Mason in blind hatred, as though resentful of the speechlessness which was keeping a first-grade detective on his calluses all night.

"Speak up, buddy. Why did you kill him?"



The door of the tank room was opening slowly. Mason's interrogator wheeled about and stared angrily, a red flush suffusing his cheeks.

"Hey, you," he bellowed. "Shut that door. Keep the hell out of here."

The door continued to swing open. Into the room stepped a white-faced harness cop, his body wobbling about his knees.

"It's orders, MacGregor," he croaked plaintively. "The Inspector says you got to stop working on him."

The big man's face became apoplectic. "You mean to say, I gotta quit right when he's getting ready to spill everything?"

The harness bull nodded. "That's right. We ain't got the chink, so we can't hold him."

"You mean we ain't got the body?"

"It's the head I'm referrin' to, MacGregor. The girl took it with her when she popped out of sight."

"The girl did *what*?"

"Popped right out of sight. She is sitting by the Inspector's desk when she jumps up, grabs the basket which has the chink in it, and says, 'Tell him I'll always love him. Tell him I'm waking up *back there*. Tell him I'm taking this horrible thing with me. Back where it came from.'

"She starts running then. The Inspector jumps up and leaps around in front of her. He thinks she is heading for the door, but she ain't at all. Right in front of the Inspector's desk there is a flash of light, and she is gone.

"Huh, you should have seen the Inspector's face. I try not to let my feelings show. But just between us, MacGregor, I'm as startled as the Inspector. Yeah, and twice as scared. The basket keeps right on moving. It sails across the room and out through the door.

"The Inspector lets out a yell and dashes out into the corridor after it. I just stand there shivering, too scared to move a muscle. The Inspector is gone for maybe ten



seconds. When he comes back he has the basket, all right, but the chink is no longer in it.

“‘Kelly,’ he says, ‘go down to the tank room and tell MacGregor to lay off. We’ve been the victims of a mass Hal Lucy Nation.’ That’s what he said—Hal Lucy Nation. Who the hell is that guy, MacGregor?”

MacGregor didn’t reply. He was staring down at Mason, who had slipped from his chair and was lying stretched out on the floor, his shoulders heaving in the dazzling light.

Mason’s sobs were heart-rending. But it wasn’t Mason’s sobs which gave MacGregor a turn. It was the *other* guy.

A tall guy wearing white shorts, and sandals with little branching wings on them. He was bending over Mason, a long, crooked cane in his hand. He was speaking softly, his voice like a whisper from the grave. “You’ll get over it,” he was saying. “Time softens grief, you know. I’m sorry you had to pick up my staff, and catch that girl with it.”

He smiled a trifle shamefacedly. “Unfortunately, I’ve a prankish side to my nature. When I was a newborn babe I stole the cows of Apollo and released them on the dark side of the Moon. It gave my parents a jolt, I can tell you. Since then I’ve amused myself by playing practical jokes on the human race.

“I know it’s shameful, but my staff is a constant temptation in that respect. I can change it so easily into a snake, a divining rod, an umbrella—anything retaining the general proportions of a staff.”

His voice deepened slightly. “This time I transformed it into a fishing rod and gave it to a tramp to pawn. I thought, the pawnbroker will put it in his window and a fisherman will buy it. What a jolt he will get!

“You see, I can always recover the staff again. I have merely to summon it, and it leaps into my hand from wherever it happens to be in the world. And when it has performed an act of magic, I know . . . I know all the details.”

MacGregor was recovering from his surprise. He thrust



out his jaw and glared at the stooping figure, his face crimson. "You!" he bellowed. "Who let you in here? Who said you could talk to the prisoner?"

The stooping figure arose. "I must go now. Conversing with mortals is a constant strain. Nowadays, in their blind ignorance, they deny the very existence of the gods. I came simply to beg your forgiveness. I intended to play a practical joke; not a cruel one. I could bring her back easily enough, but you would be miserable wedded to a woman who died before you were born. Your tastes, your sympathies would be as far apart as the poles."

The stranger's passing was not at all sensational. He simply turned and walked away across the tank room, a faint, whitish cloud swirling up about him. There was a dwindling of bare legs and radiant shoulders, a sudden inrush of empty air. Merely that, and a stillness descending broken only by MacGregor's harsh breathing, and the continuous sobbing of the man on the floor.



## *The Elemental*

WHEELER thought it was a coincidence at first. Ebony Lady was losing steadily in the sunlight. She was falling back to fourth place, passing Radio Crooner in reverse and galloping steadily in the wrong direction over the nut-brown track.

Or so it seemed to the grandstand and the cheering crowds beyond the finish line. Actually Ebony Lady's retrogressive spurt was an optical illusion. With no mist in her nostrils, the fastest wet-weather colt in all the Blue Grass was emulating a telegraph pole glimpsed from an express train.

Then came the "coincidence." Ebony Lady stopped passing horses in reverse, and recaptured the lead again. She retook the lead in less than five seconds spurting past three horses like a jet of liquid petrolatum.

Wheeler rubbed his eyes. Had he turned an also-ran into a winner with one little thought? For several hours now he had been aware of a strange, new power in himself. Just by concentrating he could push people aside when he walked. In a crowd, when he needed elbow room he could clear a path for himself.

But Ebony Lady was thundering over the turf a quarter



of a mile away! And in his mind there was no awareness of strain. He was merely thinking, "I want that horse to go faster. I want that horse to *win*."

Push, push. A little purposeful thought, moving about in his mind!

Someone was tugging at his sleeve. "Well, for crying out loud! Look at that horse go!"

Wheeler did not like to be touched. He scowled resentfully, and withdrew his gaze from the track. Standing beside him was a bald-headed stout man in a checkered suit, his heavy-jowled face studded with sweat, his eyes jiggling in his head.

"Nothing can stop her now! Look at her go!"

Wheeler rasped, "It's barely possible that I can stop her, mister."

The fat man let go of Wheeler's arm and edged nervously away along the paddock rail.

"A screw loose," he muttered.

Wheeler brushed his sleeve as though a contamination had descended upon it, and returned his gaze to the track. Ebony Lady was bearing down on the finish line with flying hoofs, her long neck out-thrust, her jockey bent double in an ecstasy of anticipation.

Wheeler did not want Ebony Lady to lose. He desperately needed the five dollars he had placed on Ebony Lady to win. But—well, he *had* to find out. It was vital to his peace of mind.

Could he slow up Ebony Lady with a thought? Was the new power as tremendous as he feared?

He thought, "I want that horse to go slower. I want that horse to fall back."

Like jets of liquid petrolatum three horses, including Radio Crooner, spurted past Ebony Lady.

The man in the checkered suit gasped. He swung about and stared at Wheeler with startled eyes.

Wheeler said tremulously, "I did it, you see."

Something about the fat man repelled Wheeler. But he



was horribly shaken. He had to discuss it with someone.

The fat man said, "You did *what*? Slowed Ebony Lady? You expect me to swallow that?"

Wheeler's lips were white. "I'm not trying to convince you," he said. "I'm simply stating a fact."

"A fact, eh?" jeered the other. "Then suppose you put that wet horse back in the lead again. It ought to be easy—on a dry track!"

Wheeler sighed. "Very well," he said. "Watch Ebony Lady."

He allowed the thought to form. "I want that horse to win." Push, push. A little purposeful thought directed across the turf to where bright hoofs were thundering.

Ebony Lady seemed to leave the ground as she came abreast of Radio Crooner, and thundered into high again. Now she was third, now second, now a length off the leader. Now she was passing the leader two furlongs from the finish line.

The people in the grandstand were shouting themselves hoarse. Like some demoniac hippogriff Ebony Lady flashed past the judge's stand, wrenching a blare from the loud-speaker: "Ebony Lady it is, ladies and gentlemen. Ebony Lady wins the Derby!"

The fat man was visibly stunned. "It's—it's uncanny," he muttered.

Wheeler nodded. "I don't understand it myself," he said.

The fat man thrust his face forward, a rapacious light gleaming behind his pupils.

"Could you do it again?" he ventured.

"What do you mean?"

"At another race? Anytime?"

Wheeler nodded. "I am sure that I could," he said.

The fat man edged closer. "Where you headed for, buddy?"

Wheeler said, "I've got to collect ten dollars from a bookie."



The fat man took out a mammoth roll of bills, and peeled off one.

"Chicken feed," he said. "Take this and come with me. I'm staking you to a drink."

Wheeler hesitated. He thought, "I don't want liquor. But I could order a glass of milk and get him to taste it."

The fat man was tugging at his sleeve. "Come on, buddy. One little drink won't hurt you."

Five minutes later they were seated at the circular counter of a trackside soft drink concession. Outside in the sunlight the crowd was slowly dispersing, streaming north, south and west over the dappled turf.

Wheeler was holding a glass of milk, his thin fingers coiled tightly about whiteness. His companion was attached to a whisky and soda.

He was scowling at Wheeler. "*Milk*," he said contemptuously.

Wheeler said, "It's against the law to serve liquor at the track, Mr. Sheed. This concession is violating the law."

"Call me Ted," said the fat man. "Look, Harry, why can't you relax and be human? We could help each other. I have plenty of what it takes to cash in on a sure thing."

Wheeler said, "I'll admit it's a temptation. I've been out of work for two months. I've stood in breadlines, bunked in flop houses—"

Suddenly he shivered. He was forgetting about the milk. He raised the glass to his lips and sipped at it fearfully. A look of horror came into his face.

Sheed said, "Well, what do you say?"

Tremulously Wheeler set down the glass and pushed it toward his companion. "I wish you'd just taste that milk," he said.

Sheed grimaced. "Why in hell should I? I don't like milk. It strangles me."

"Just taste it, please," insisted Wheeler.

"Oh, all right."

Sheed raised the glass and took a reluctant sip. In-



stantly he set the beverage down with such violence that the counter shook.

"Sour!" he exclaimed. "Sour as a rancid herring."

All the color drained from Wheeler's face. "Then it's true," he groaned. "I haven't been imagining it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Every time I taste milk it turns sour," said Wheeler.

Sheed growled impatiently. "So what? You got acidosis or something. It happens all the time."

"No, it doesn't," insisted Wheeler. "You see, I know something about acid diathesis. I used to work in a pathological testing laboratory. You can't turn milk sour simply by tasting it. I mean, if you had a rheumatic or gouty diathesis, which is a very acid condition, you could gargle with milk, and it wouldn't turn sour."

Sheed was becoming exasperated. "You can speed up the horses," he growled, "and you're worrying about a little thing like that. Goaty die teasers. Bah!"

Suddenly Wheeler seized his companion's glass and drained it at a gulp.

"Hey, wait a minute," protested Sheed. "You didn't have to do that. I'll order you a man's drink."

"Make it a double Scotch and soda," said Wheeler.

The high brown beverage did things to Wheeler. His despair receded and a wave of moral indignation surged up in him. He began to see his companion in a less favorable light. He leaned forward across the table.

"You mean, it's a gold mine?" he inquired.

"A regular gold mine, sure. I'll pick the horses and you'll speed 'em up. We'll be living off the fat, my lad."

Wheeler said, "You're distinctly slimy, Sheed. I don't like you."

"What's that?"

"I don't like your fat, smirking face!"

Sheed's face turned scarlet. He ceased to smirk. He leaped to his feet and stood glaring down at Wheeler. "I've a good mind to sock you," he said.



The thought formed quickly: "Push him fast and far."

Sheed screamed. Something lifted him up, twisted him around. He went sailing erratically across the little soft drink concession, his body rotating about his knees.

There was a splintering of glass. Out through the window of the concession Sheed spun. He sailed over the paddock rail and crashed to the turf on his face.

Wheeler smiled, rose and laid four quarters beside his drained whisky and soda. "Now that was distinctly worthwhile," he said.

Swiftly he slipped from the concession and mingled with the dispersing crowd.

People brushed against him. He laughed and sent them lightly spinning. The human throng divided as he walked. Being a man of kindly instincts, he did not abuse his power. There was no animosity in his mind. It simply amused him to watch people spin away from him, and whirl about like leaves in a dry wind. He felt like an Israelite walking through the Red Sea.

He kept on walking, ignoring startled and resentful glances. He lifted a woman six feet in the air and sent her sailing like a feather across the track. She landed thirty feet away, screaming hysterically. A crowd converged about her. Wheeler pushed the entire congregation of appalled men, women and children fifty feet along the track.

Instantly he reproached himself: "That was shameful. I shouldn't have done that."

In contrition he took to levitating his own body. He rose into the air and sailed lightly over the turf. In little aerial spurts he progressed above the heads of the dispersing throng. Once he descended on the shoulders of a fat man who tottered and yelled.

"Sorry," he apologized and rose into the air again.

He was thinking. "I've always wanted to fly. Now I am truly flying."

He flapped his arms as though they were wings. "I should like to soar," he thought.



Instantly he rose high into the air. He rose two thousand feet and soared like a condor high above the grandstand. Far below him he saw little specks dispersing. Here and there the specks coalesced into wriggling, dark clumps with agitated peripheries.

People in terror. Dozens of tiny people flocking together under the stress of a shared horror.

He rose higher, flew more audaciously. Presently he was "winging" his way toward the east. Flap, flap, flap.

Beneath him stretched fields of blue grass. He saw cows at pasture, winding country lanes, brooks glimmering in the sunlight. He saw a meadow starred with white-flowered asphodels.

He thought, "I must remain calm. I must not allow myself to become excited."

Kentucky was a beautiful state. Now he was flying high above an old Southern mansion. He saw people moving about in the vicinity of the great house, sleekly groomed horses galloping on a private bridle path, plantation workers toiling in the bright noonday glare.

He passed swiftly eastward, soaring over the Black Mountains into Virginia, winging his way across the Blue Ridge and the Coastal Plain.

He thought, "This is more exhilarating than traveling in box cars," and swooped low to observe a yellow-crowned night heron which was rising from the sombre cypress-hung Dismal Swamp and winging its way toward the bright waters of Chesapeake Bay.

He followed the heron in a kind of trance. In the depths of his mind terror churned, but it did not flow into his consciousness—except occasionally in little eddies.

He had moments of sudden, terrible doubt, of perplexity and fright. But so entranced was he by his gift of flight that he shivered in rapture and ignored the dark misgivings which occasionally assailed him.

Flap, flap, flap. He was flying now above Pokomoke Sound, the coast of Virginia a glimmering blue line far to



the west. The heron had vanished, and he was alone under the sun.

He had been flying steadily for hours but he was not fatigued. Or was he? It was barely possible that he was getting a little tired. He had to keep repeating to himself: "I am flying effortlessly now. I am as bouyant as a feather."

The sense of buoyancy receded a little when he ceased to concentrate and then he found himself descending towards the bright gleaming waters of the Sound.

The waters were reddening when fatigue crept unmistakably upon him. Flying became an effort. But resolutely he kept flapping his arms and assuring himself that he was lighter than air.

He was flying low above big and little islands when his buoyancy ebbed disastrously. His legs became leaden, inert. Horror engulfed him as he stared downward. He had ceased to mount and the level expanse of water beneath him was ascending like a rising floor.

For a thousand feet he fell like a plummet, flailing the air with his arms. He was almost level with the waves when something seemed to burst in his chest. He spun about and zoomed erratically, spurting eastward over a little island, and whirling about high in the air.

The little island was barely forty feet in diameter, a pinnacle of jagged rock emerging precariously from the wine-dark sea.

Whirligigging like a May fly Wheeler descended toward it. He swirled over a menacing spire of granite and came jarringly to rest on a sloping ledge where barnacles clustered. For an instant he stood swaying above the sea, his eyes wide with terror.

Something like a cloud was settling down beside him. He felt for an instant like a jellyfish on stilts. Then his legs turned to water, and he sank down on the spray-lashed granite.

The cloud became denser, coalescing into an upright



cone that shimmered with a pale luminescence. Wheeler groaned and raised himself on his hands.

A voice said, "You are less intelligent than an idiot child."

All the blood seeped from Wheeler's face, leaving it ashen. Swirling beside him on the spray-drenched rock was a conical mass of spray, its summit rainbow-hued, two iridescent orbs gleaming in its tenuous bulk.

The blood-red disk of the sun was slipping below the rim of the bay, but there was still sufficient illumination to mingle the shadows of Wheeler and the cone. The shadow of the cone was wolfishly devouring the shadow of Wheeler, consuming its human outlines with evident relish.

Wheeler's flesh congealed. He started to back away across the rock, but directly he moved the cone swirled closer.

"Be careful, you fool," it warned. "That rock is slippery."

The cone's voice was resonant but expressionless. It bumped against Wheeler and swiftly rebounded, its rainbow-hued bulk glistened in the spray.

Wheeler's teeth were chattering. "What . . . what are you?" he moaned.

The cone said, "An elemental. A force elemental. I have no intention of harming you. I am as much to blame as you are for this . . . this calamity."

"But how did you get here?"

"You brought me here," replied the cone. "When you exhausted my energies I couldn't sustain you any longer."

"You mean you came with me?"

"Of course. I've been inhabiting your body for several days. It was an experiment which I now regret."

"You've been inhabiting my—"

"I took possession of your body temporarily. You know what an elemental is, don't you?"

Wheeler hesitated for an instant. "I . . . I think I do," he



said, finally. "A nature spirit. A spirit of earth, air, fire or water."

"That is substantially correct," said the cone. "I am glad you did not say a *force* of nature. I am not a force in a scientific sense. I am a true spirit."

"A true *spirit*?"

"Yes. I am as real as an elf or goblin. Your scientists deny that spirits exist. Right under their noses we inhabit the bodies of idiot children. We raise tables into the air, break crockery, send objects spinning and they deny that we exist!"

"You mean you're a poltergeist," exclaimed Wheeler, his jaw gaping.

"You may call me that if you wish. Each age has a different name for us. The Greeks preferred to think of us simply as nature spirits who could curdle milk, ride the night wind, set mysterious fire and wreck ships at sea."

Wheeler stammered. "But why . . . why did you pick on me?"

"It was sheer madness," said the elemental, "but . . . well, you are a *new frontier*. No elemental has ever dared to inhabit an adult mortal before. Children, yes—idiot children. Their imbecile rages are of brief duration and do not exhaust us. But adult mortals have minds of their own."

"You mean you are subject to the whims of my mind?"

"In a sense, yes. When you think of something you want to do I am compelled to assist you. Helping you at the racetrack was tiring, but this flight has drained me completely."

"It was your presence within me that made me reckless," said Wheeler. "I wanted to fly because I was sure that I could."

"I know," said the elemental. "We are caught in a vicious circle. I give you ideas and a sense of power, and you exhausted me. So long as I am bound to you I am compelled to satisfy the demands of your will."

"But you could leave me, couldn't you?"



"No. I can pour out of you and move objects at a distance, or I can move about close to you as I am doing now. But I cannot leave you. Have you ever watched a caterpillar spin a cocoon? It draws the threads continuously tighter about itself until it is completely imprisoned."

"But you are outside your prison now," protested Wheeler.

"Merely as a penumbral projection," explained the elemental. "My matrix is still inhabiting your body. We elementals are beings of a complex structure. If you could see me as I really am you would understand."

The black shadows of night were closing in swiftly now. There were little, rubescent glints on the dark water, but the sun had vanished from view. Far out in the bay a gull wheeled and dipped. The elemental seemed to be shivering.

"I am exhausted . . . ill," it said. "I wish it were morning."

Wheeler stared at it in sudden apprehension. "You mean you can't levitate me in the darkness? We . . . we won't be able to fly back?"

The elemental said, "You fool! Did you have to fly out over the sea?"

"I intended to return," said Wheeler. "I didn't know your power would fail me."

"Well, it has failed," said the elemental. "I am close to death."

Wheeler paled. "*You mean you can die?*"

"Of course. Elementals are not immortal. When our energies expire we burst into flames. We die in bursts of glory."

"Good God!" exclaimed Wheeler.

The elemental drew close to him, bounced against him and ascended into the air. It flew in a swift circle about the little island and descended in a shower of sparks.

Wheeler cried out in horror. He recoiled backward and nearly toppled into the sea.



The elemental swirled towards him across the rock. "Careful, you fool! I was just testing my strength."

Wheeler pulled himself to safety again, his shoes dripping brine. Sharp barnacles tore at his clothes as he dragged himself to the summit of the rock. He sat with his feet dangling a yard above the water, staring at the elemental with resentful eyes.

"Did you have to frighten me like that?"

"I'm sorry," apologized the elemental. "Would my death distress you so much?"

"If you die, I'll freeze to death," muttered Wheeler. "I'll starve. I'll die of thirst. We're on one of the little rock islands south of Cape Charles. No ships pass this way at all."

"I see," said the elemental coldly. "A purely selfish reaction."

Wheeler groaned and fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. "Why did this have to happen to me?" he muttered.

He was lighting the cigarette when the elemental swirled towards him like a devouring entity. It tore the match from his fingers and whirled it about in the air. The flame spurted in all directions. It rayed through the elemental from base to summit, bathing it in an unearthly refulgence.

"Ah, that is good," murmured the spirit as the glow subsided. "I feel better now."

Wheeler gasped. "You mean you can draw energy from a flame?"

"From light, you fool. Tomorrow when the sun rises I shall suck in energy and be strong again. The sun is the source of all my strength."

A great wave of relief surged up in Wheeler. He fumbled for another match, lit it, held it up. Instantly it was snatched from his fingers. For fifteen minutes he fed the elemental matches.

He had one match left when he said, "Can I smoke now?"



"Go ahead," said the elemental.

Wheeler felt better as soon as the soothing smoke entered his lungs. He inhaled deeply, sighed and assumed a more comfortable position on the rock.

"I suppose we shall be here until morning," he said, with resignation.

He did not see the wave coming. It rose up behind him, crashed against the rock and drenched him with spray from head to foot. The spray was ice cold and so was the little eel that plopped against his neck and slithered down under his collar behind.

Wheeler began cursing softly in the semi-darkness, his fingers clutching in despair a charred cylinder that dripped.

The elemental said, "I must be fairly strong even now, if I can raise a wave."

The night passed wretchedly for Wheeler. The cold crept into his bones and filled his throat with phlegm. He dozed and woke in fitful starts.

Once he awoke suddenly and saw the elemental bobbing about in the sea. Once he saw it standing amidst shadows with its back to a cloud. The moon was veiled in a mist, but the luminosity which poured from the eternally vigilant cone bathed the little island in a spectral radiance.

Toward morning Wheeler fell into a heavy sleep. He slept dreamlessly at first, but when light touched his eyelids he began to stir and dream about the sun. He dreamed that he was flying about the solar disk, his body revolving like a planet, his arms flapping in the dawn. Beside him raced the planet Mercury, its orbit coinciding with his own. Within him surged boundless power; a sense of kinship with the great orb of life. Now he was passing little Mercury in his flight above the sun.

He awoke with a start. The air about him was bright and cold. It was a greyish brightness. The island and the sea were enshrouded in a bright, greyish fog!

A fog! It swirled above the water and, rising in little eddies, flowed mistily about the rock upon which he lay.



He was aware of a wailing, a hideous sobbing immediately beneath him.

"I am dying. Oh, I am dying. The sun has failed me."

The silver-grey passenger seaplane was winging its way over Chesapeake Bay. The pilot was gazing downward at the long, bright coast-line of a mighty peninsula that reached outward with eager arms into the sea. He was passing directly over a group of little islands when he saw the light. A sudden, blinding flare that lit up all the sea beneath him, and ascended to the sky, brightening the clouds. A terrific flare in daylight, amidst a dispersing fog.

His hands trembled on the controls. He turned to the assistant pilot beside him, issued swift commands.

"We must descend immediately. That was an emergency flare. A plane is down perhaps."

Beside him a grim boy nodded. "Yes, I understand. It came from one of those little islands, didn't it?"

The plane descended in a slow arc above Chesapeake Bay. It descended competently, for its pilots were Mineola-trained experts who knew how to approach the sea with foresight in a region where islands clustered thickly.

Swiftly downward the plane swooped, a great behemoth of the skyways that trembled not at all as its silvery bulk descended above the fog-wreathed water. The fog still clung tenuously to the still water in ghostlike filaments.

Nebulously the little rock island loomed out of the bay, seeming to increase in height as the plane swooped level with the waves and scudded to rest in a swirl of foam.

"You're sure that was the island," said the pilot who had first sighted the flare. He stared across the filmy water, squinting through filtering sunlight at a jagged pinnacle of rock.

"I'm positive," said the grim boy. "There's someone on it, too. Shall we hail him?"

"Wait a minute," said the other. "We're drifting closer."

The plane was within fifty feet of the little island when the castaway came distinctly into view. The two pilots



stared incredulously. The grim boy was wearing spectacles. Swiftly he took them off, wiped them and put them on again.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "How do you suppose *that* got there?"

Clinging tenaciously to the rock was a frail little man in shabby clothes, a crushed derby adhering to his skull, his shoes and trouser legs flaked with crystals of snow-white salt. Red sunlight was pouring revealingly on his upturned face, clotting at the corners of his mouth and filling his eye cavities with a lambent radiance.

His face in the thin, dispersing fog resembled a skull suspended above a lake of brimstone, with the lurid vapors of Hades swirling up above it.

Getting that frail, half-frozen little man off the rock and into the passenger cabin was a task as complicated as it was hazardous, but the Mineola-trained pilots were equal to the emergency. And once inside the cabin the little man was no longer a problem. The passengers took over.

They fussed over him, and graciously endeavoured to make him as comfortable as possible. There was something about him that appealed to the maternal instinct of the women passengers. But the men were kind to him, too.

They screened him from view while they helped him into dry clothes, offering him underwear and outer garments which were warm and expensive. One stout man opened a suitcase and presented him with a hand-tailored shirt. Another made him a gift of neatly pressed trousers. They helped him don a yellow Angora golf sweater and a tweed sport coat.

But despite everything they could do for him his face kept straining against the light. He stood shivering and gazing out the cabin window at the sea, as though he were looking at a picture under glass. A picture that terrified and appalled him.

He stood rigid in his expensive but ill-fitting clothes,



beads of sweat on his thin face to which a two days' growth of beard gave something of an ascetic cast.

"You'd better sit down," said a tall, elderly woman in a tailor-made suit whose severity of manner was redeemed by kindly eyes. "Better sit down there by the window in the sun. You've been through a terrible ordeal, my poor man."

Wheeler passed a hand across his brow. He shuddered, convulsively. "Thank you," he murmured. "It was awful, *feeling* it die. It seemed to wrench at me."

The passengers were all staring at him in concern. One of the pilots shook his head sadly, and made a rotary motion with his forefinger close to his temple.

The little man said suddenly, "But the dazzle saved me, didn't it? The dazzle brought you down. It died in a burst of glory, didn't it?"

"Yes," said the stout man to humor him. "I guess it did."

"Twelve hours in the thick fog, without sunlight, and toward the end I could feel it dying."

Suddenly he sat up straight in his chair. "Could I . . . could I have a glass of milk?" he asked.

"Why, of course," said the pilot.

The milk was cold, and there were little bubbles at the edge of the glass. It was just an ordinary glass of milk, but as Wheeler held it he was shaken to the depths of his being. His first and most powerful feeling was that he was about to free himself of a hideous dread. He was about to prove to himself that he was no longer possessed.

But he had also a feeling of loss and desolation. He was about to sound the knell of something almost godlike. The gift of flight, the power to move and shake.

Slowly he raised the glass, slowly he drank.

"Well," said the pilot, smiling down at him. "Feel better now?"

Wheeler did not reply. He sat staring up at the pilot in consternation, his lips tremulous, his eyes wide with horror.

"I can't taste this milk at all," he gasped. "It . . . it has



absolutely no taste. It doesn't even feel cool on my tongue!"

A tall man with a grizzled Vandyke arose from a seat near the aisle and crossed to Wheeler's chair.

"Shock anesthesia," he explained patiently. "It lasts for hours sometimes."

Then he perceived how perturbed Wheeler was and smiled reassuringly. "Nothing to get alarmed about. By this time tomorrow you'll be fit as a fiddle. Able to move mountains, my lad. Able to move mountains."

There is such a thing as expecting too much of a man. Wheeler paled, groaned, dropped his glass, and slid from the chair in a dead faint.



## ***Golden Child***

BETTY ANNE did not like the new neighbors. She had overheard them talking together, and though she did not know the meaning of the word they had called her daddy she knew it was a very crooked word.

“X-send-trick!”

She hated crooked people. Wonderful was her daddy, straight in everything he did, and she could not stand it when people whispered about him behind his back.

Who else but her daddy could have built a cage with giraffe people peering out, not behind bars at all, but straight out between big red and white candy sticks like in front of barber shops?

He had locked up the garage, and did not know she was inside now standing in front of the cage. She was sure if he did know he would have been worried, and it was a shame the way mean, crooked people worried her daddy.

The grocer was crooked and the rent man was bent, and there could be no meaner person than the droopy-looking big man in a black overcoat who had gone inside the house, and carried off all of her daddy’s “furnasure.”

The droopy big man had taken the “furnasure” away in a van, and right after that her daddy had locked himself in



the garage, and she had had the hardest time getting him to talk about the cage.

"What would happen if I was locked up behind those big peppermint sticks, Daddy?" she had asked, and that had started him talking.

"They're not peppermint sticks, Betty Anne, and it just looks like a cage. The candy sticks are force bands and the redness is a space-warp field. If you were behind the bars you'd be warped through the space-time continuum, and come out on one of the planets—Mars, Venus, or Mercury. But you couldn't begin to understand."

"Couldn't I, Daddy?"

"No, and I'm not going to torture my own child by trying to explain what a warp field is. If you had a mature mind you'd know that highly technical explanations seldom mean anything. When a man is a real physicist he knows when he's on the right track and when he isn't, but he doesn't let theories bother him until he's done it."

"Have you done it, Daddy?"

"Betty Anne, that cage, as you call it, was a lucky accident invention. If it flew apart not even Einstein could put it together again."

"But you could, Daddy?"

"No, I couldn't. You can seldom duplicate lucky accident inventions. They're much too simple in a complex way."

"So," she had thought. "Daddy's being modest again." Modest was a grownup word, but she knew what it meant. It meant being able to do anything, but pretending you were not bright at all.

Later, she had waited inside the garage, crouching behind the car until he had locked her in. He had not acted modest, standing in front of the cage, and thinking out loud like a lot of people were talking to him inside his head, and he had been hurt so bad he had to talk back.

"What price genius? You'd think I'd tried to poison



somebody's cat. Just how much of a man's furniture has to go when he's working on an inside track?"

She had known who he was really talking to, of course. He was talking to Somebody called Posterity, and she had heard him say it so many times she could say it, too.

Posterity! You had a doll and somebody took it away, and somebody blackened your face and laughed at you, and then would come—Posterity! Posterity would give you a new and better doll, and wash your face, and kiss you, and put you to bed between stiff white sheets.

She had wondered what he had meant by an inside track. Did he mean that inside trains you saw new and wonderful places that made you wish you were grown up?

She had waited until he was gone before coming out from behind the car and crawling towards the cage on her hands and knees. She had heard the padlock rattle on the outside door, and his footfalls going back into the house. Her daddy had a heavy tread.

Clump, clump, clump, like he was all drooping down from his shoulders into the ground.

She was not scared to be alone with the cage, because he had invented it. She was not scared, so—why had he told her to stay away from it?

"Don't stand too close to the cage, Betty Anne. The warp field would draw you in, and whirl you around like a little white feather."

Closer and closer she had crawled, till the candy bars had begun to frighten her. They looked like big red and white candles melting and flickering and running together. Very close up something like a hand she could not see, big and flat, had given her a push, and something like an eggbeater had whipped her around and spanked her till she had started bawling.

Suddenly everything had seemed to stop. She was sitting on the floor again, and the cage had changed back. It was a cage again, only now she was not really alone with it.



She had had to rub her eyes to make sure she was really awake.

The giraffe people were staring out between the candy sticks straight at her. Very high up they were, with big, hoofed feet and flapping hands, and all shiny were their eyes peering out. In a dream, she knew, it was all right to run. But when you were locked up and could not, it was wrong to be scared. You could not be a coward, then, even if you wanted to run.

Just to make sure she was not scared, she had started crawling toward the cage again. For a better look, closer and—

Swish! Thump! Slap!

Now she was moving closer again for the umpteenth time, because the eggbeater had made her very angry.

She had a feeling the giraffe people were on her side. They had moved back when the big hand had pushed her back, as though it was not anything they could help, and they wanted her to know it.

They had wriggled their big ears at her, and now she was walking straight towards them with her chin stuck out. Nearer and nearer, and they were nodding at her, and telling her not to be afraid—

She screamed and tried to jump back. Something had grabbed hold of her, but she could not see it because all at once she was being pulled straight in between the candy sticks so fast she knew it was not the eggbeater, but a very thin wet hand with claws like she had seen in an Oz book. . . .

He was a tall, very thin tramp, running. It was curious, but he always thought of himself as a scarecrow, playing a game of touch and go with the police.

Ever-so-gentle was he in his thoughts, but the police thought him a dangerous character, not good enough to sleep under haystacks, with the red harvest moon shining down on his gaunt unshaven face.

He had never stolen anything, or made himself con-



spicuous by parading his leanness in front of restaurants, yet the police were always worried because he might take it into his head to put them on the spot.

He was running straight toward the garage in the moonlight, his tall body casting shadows even gaunter than the scarecrow he had become through no fault of his own.

He could hear the heavy thud of flat feet on the grass behind him, the shrill bleat of a police whistle.

He veered sharply the instant he saw the big padlock on the garage door, leaving the gravel path and plunging into shadows with his head thrown back. At such moments his mind would become keen, alert, and he could smell out barn windows like a wheeling bat.

Whether in barns or garages, unlocked windows offered him a chance of getting his wind back. It was not touch or go so much when the police were outside wondering how he had managed to give them the slip.

Sometimes a window would snap shut behind him like the jaws of a trap. More often the pounding feet would move on, and he would be free again to drink in the beauty of the night.

The garage window was high and narrow. It creaked a little when he threw it open. But he made up for that by climbing in so soundlessly he could hear his racing heart beating wildly.

An electric bulb of low wattage splashed radiance over his long shadow as he swung down inside. Then he flattened himself against a big Lincoln that looked as though it had not been moved since petrol rationing went into effect.

He had not intended to make a sound, but something happened, almost at once, which altered his plans. Something like a wind it was, blowing across the garage straight towards him, twisting him around and lifting him up.

First his shabby coat went up over his head, choking off his breathing, and then something seemed to take hold of him, and whirl him about. Around and around, faster and



faster, till his head was lower than his seat. Then he could feel himself being funneled head downward into what could only have been a coal chute leading somewhere else. . . .

Swish, went the long grass, and bong, went the big bell inside his head. *Swish bong, swish bong, swish bong*—

Blinking, he sat up. As he did so the bell seemed to swing away across vast, blue distances, and only the long grass remained, purple and sweet-scented, rising to his shoulders.

He wondered why they had had to hit him so hard. A night stick could be used in two ways. To beat a tattoo on a man's soles till he stood up, or to make him sit down.

He was sitting down, so it had to mean some cop had stepped out of line, and used it the second way. If that had happened, there were "mouthpieces" he could get to talk about it for the purpose of making him rich!

For an instant he visualized himself in great pain, lying on a cold pavement with his knees higher than his head. Then he remembered he had gone in through a window.

Memory came rushing back, in great, chill gusts. They had not hit at all! Not the police. He had gone down through a coal chute into—wherever he was.

He wet his lips, raised his eyes slowly. No risk in that? He had not thought of being frightened, but what he saw scared him worse than the coal chute.

The sky was pale blue. Something had shriveled up the harvest moon so that it was now a little green pea floating in the middle of the sky.

He never knew how he got up from a sitting position to his feet. He seemed to float up, to stand looking out over the long, purple grass.

He stood there a long time, just staring and listening.

Somebody was sobbing in the long grass a few feet from where he was standing. A small somebody, unless children had changed in the long years he had been a shabby scarecrow with no one to smile down at.

He thought it best to lower himself to his knees before



searching about for her through the long grass. He did not want a frightened little face looking at him in terror, because he was so tall and thin.

"Daddy, Daddy!" Betty Anne was sobbing, and then she saw that he was not at all. He was just a plain tramp, with a red nose and a dented-in derby hat. She had never seen a plain tramp before, but her daddy had. He had told her there were many different kinds of such people—hobos, drifters, hopheads, and plain tramps, real tramps, like when her daddy was a boy.

The plain tramp was scowling at her through the long grass, and shaking his head.

"Who are you?" she asked with a sob.

"You mean my handle. Joe Caffee, little lady. What's yours?"

"Betty Anne Andrews."

He smiled briefly. Then suddenly there was a worried expression on his face.

"How did we get here, little lady?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"The giraffe people brought me," she choked. "They carried me straight through the whopper field into here."

"The giraf—I don't think I've met them."

"You wouldn't like them. They're mean and crooked, and I hate them."

"Is that so?"

"They—they had like a clay modeling set, and they upset it on me!" she bridled, her lips trembling.

Joe Caffee's eyes widened. "They upset a clay modeling set on you?"

She nodded. "They rubbed on a clay modeling all sticky like mud. See?"

Betty Anne held out her hands for him to see.

"Hmm, yeah. Looks like somebody round here sculps."

"Sculps, Mister Joe?"

Joe nodded. "Makes statues and things. First they'd take an impression in clay. Then would come the real art work."



I could maybe figure out more if I knew where we were. Sure you don't know?"

"'Course I know!" Betty Anne ejaculated. "We're on a planet away off in the sky. Daddy built a cage to make people crooked. Only it isn't really a cage. It's a space-curve-sure field. He said if you was inside it you would be all twisted up, like in a puzzle book, and you would come out on a planet through a back door in the sky."

Joe Caffee swabbed his perspiring brow. "Go on, little lady—just keep talking."

"Like when you walk through a door, and are in a house you never before saw. A crooked door, but when you come out you are straight once more."

Joe's lips were white. "I guess maybe we better start looking for your daddy," he muttered. "Here, grab hold of my hand. I'm kinda tall when I stand up."

"How can you find my daddy when he's hundreds and millions of miles away?"

She slipped her hand into his as she spoke, wondering why she had asked. If grownups did not know what they were doing it was no good asking, and if they did know, the worst things always happened.

There was not a sound as they moved through the long grass, except their soft footfalls, and the swish of the long grass bending. Their shadows kept pace with them, his long and hers short, on the grass ahead, and in patches on the earth between. There was not much earth, just a few, rusty-looking patches here and there where something had trampled the grass down and left big hoofmarks.

"Gee, your hand's cold," Betty Anne said suddenly. "You're not scared, are you?"

"Me scared?" Joe muttered. "Don't make me laugh, little lady."

"I'm awful scared, Uncle Joe. I really am."

He started to say something to reassure her, but before he could get the words out a voice whispered inside his head.



"No reason for the little Earth child to be frightened. We're not *monsters*."

With a great surge of horror Joe raised his eyes as though fearful he might not be mistaken.

He was not. The creature did have a long neck, like a giraffe, and its flesh was spotted. But its big balloonlike face was not in the least giraffelike. It had ten-fingered hands which it was using now to part the long grass directly in front of him.

Joe tried vainly to moisten his lips. The creature's face was a yard from his own, and if someone had taken a big balloon and let all the air out, and then put in a gash with a pen knife and added two widely spaced eyes, Joe would rather have died a thousand deaths than to have created such a face.

"We know you're from the third planet from the sun, a planet which you call Earth and we call Kakacon," the creature said.

"We call our planet Nerulum."

Joe tried to look away, to wrench his gaze from the flabby-fleshed horror, but he could not. Its stare held him, and more than its stare the lower part of its body which was visible now between the long grass aroused his horror. The creature was squatting on its haunches, its long legs drawn up, and spread a little apart, and between its knees was a wrinkled kangaroolike pouch which contained two miniature replicas of itself.

The young of the thing were peering at Joe over the rim of the pouch with unmistakable, cold contempt.

Their wide-spaced eyes were narrowed to steely slits.

"Why are you trembling?" the monstrous creature chided. "Is it because we can read your thoughts, and make our thoughts known to you without moving our lips? Surely—surely there is nothing terrifying about an extrasensory faculty which you also possess. Telepathy is born into us, but you have it, too. From quite a distance we were aware of your thoughts."



The creature thrust its hideous face still further forward, generating ideas in Joe's brain which he normally would have refused to entertain. He had never touched the stuff, so how could he be going through a nightmare of shrieking terror? He had never known what it was like to have the booze-humps, the ginters, or the beezy-wheezies, so how could he be having them now?

"You just now told the Earth child that we sculp. If you mean we make reproductions of beautiful things, we do! In fact, it's a consuming passion with us. When we can't sculp, we are miserable. But when we can—oh, rapture!"

Joe froze. One of the giraffelets was leaning from the pouch and sticking out its tongue at him.

The creature shuddered, grabbed the offending one by its spotted neck, and pushed it down into the pouch out of sight. For an instant its other offspring stared, goggle-eyed, and then—it took the hint. A second later it popped into view again, pursed its lips, and made a sound that was not extrasensory.

"Phat!" it went. "Phaat—phypat!"

The creature glanced down angrily, and closed the pouch by locking its ten-digeted hands over its stomach.

"The little Earth child's parent must be a remarkable Kakaconian," it said. "He constructed a force field which has enabled us to pass back and forth between Kakacon and Nerulum almost instantly. Space warp propulsion. Our construction manuals describe such fields, but we've never been able to build one."

"I—I didn't see no field when I came out into here," Joe muttered.

"Naturally you didn't. You were expelled with great violence, and hurled several hundred feet, as you measure distance."

"Uncle Joe, before he hurts us!" came in a sob from Betty Anne. "Pick me up and put me on your shoulder like you was running from Boris Karloff!"

The creature's shiny eyes protruded, and a faint redness



crept up over its long neck. "Why should the Earth child be frightened, when we sculpted her so beautifully?"

Joe's jaw tightened. His voice was suddenly harsh, defiant. "Look, tell me something. You got—sort of canals here. They're like rivers, only you dig 'em. Have you got 'em?"

"You mean artificial waterways? Of course we have them. A continuous network covering the entire planet."

"Then I know where we are!" Joe whispered huskily. "You call it Nerulum, but we call it—Mars!"

"Uncle Joe, look out!" Betty Anne screamed.

The smother of wet clay caught Joe by surprise. It thudded against his face and ran down his neck, hurling him violently backwards.

"Galump—arrgggg!"

"Oh, Uncle Joe!"

Joe came sputtering up out of a sea of wet clay with his lips pulled back, his eyes glued shut. He unlimbered his knees, jerked his arms about, and made a weird gurgling sound deep in his throat.

"A temporary inconvenience, nothing more," an admonishing voice said. "In a moment, when the clay has hardened, we'll remove the cast. You wouldn't want to stiffen up in a grotesque and hideous position, would you?"

Somehow through his panic Joe sensed that the creature was handling his mind with iron fingers of incredible strength.

"If you persist in struggling," it warned, "the cast will be ruined. I've got something here I could press against your nostrils. It wouldn't hurt much, but, the trouble is, it might stiffen you beyond redress. If your metabolism has been speeded up such a powerful drug couldn't possibly do anything but kill you."

At this Joe stopped struggling—so abruptly his tall body assumed the rigid contours of a galvanized corpse.

"Ah, that's the right attitude. Now, just breathe naturally."



I've inserted breathing tubes in your nostrils, and the clay is quite porous. Directly it hardens I'll carry you to the studio."

The creature had not warned Joe it intended to carry him in its stomach pouch. But when he felt himself being lifted up, the folds of cold flesh which enmeshed his limbs told him where he was.

He could not quite fathom how he knew the creature's flesh was cold, and clammy. But somehow he did know, despite the thin coating of clay which covered him.

"Don't Kakaconians smell funny, little brother?" said one of the little ones who was in the pouch with him.

"Phatt! Phatt—phypat!"

The bigger creature traveled by leaps and bounds. From the jolts that shuddered up through Joe Caffee every time it descended and took off, he was sure the leaps were long ones. He was sure of nothing else.

Sweat broke clammily on him beneath the clay, his mouth felt parched, and his stomach weighted with lead.

Suddenly the jolts ceased to come at intervals. Ceased so abruptly to come he could hear the blood pounding in his ears, and the muffled, slow beating of his heart.

The voice came again.

"We have arrived at the studio. I am about to lift you out, but you must not attempt to move until I crack the cast."

He felt himself being taken from the pouch.

"Remember now—you are not to move!"

He stood rigid, scarcely daring to breathe, waiting for he knew not what. Waiting for something!

Crack!

The hammer of Thor could not have descended with greater violence against a vaster backdrop of stars. He was rocked back, and then forward. Back, and then forward. His brain reeled, and the shell of blackness shattered about him. Shrieking winds seemed to drag him down into the earth.



When Joe Caffee again opened his eyes, he was sitting on a firm, unmoving ground, staring up at a sloping surface studded with little, weaving blobs of light. Swiftly the light grew in brightness and became a single expanse, shining, translucent, dazzling his sight.

He lowered his gaze, and stared wildly about him. The first thing he saw was the small, golden statue. It was sitting less than six feet from him—the statue of a little, pouting girl with her hands folded on her lap.

“Betty Anne!” he breathed. For an instant horror stabbed at him.

The Midas touch? Merciful heavens! Had the creature the ghastly power of turning flesh and blood to a shining metal?

“Uncle Joe!” came a small voice from behind him. “Oh, Uncle Joe, look! That’s me in a sculp!”

He swung about, his breath coming spasmodically.

A flesh and blood Betty Anne was staring at him with tears glistening on her cheeks. But so intense was the look of pride in her eyes that it outshone the wetness, and the furious blinking of her long lashes.

“Little lady, for a minute I thought you was a goner for sure,” Joe almost sobbed.

“Uncle Joe, I’m still scared!” Betty Anne sobbed, crawling towards him on her hands and knees. “This is an awful crooked place.”

“Yeah, so I see. How—how did you get here?”

“The giraffe people brought me. There are many more of them, Uncle Joe. The one that brought you hit you with a big stick, and then it took the clay modeling off you, and went quick away.”

“It did, eh?” Joe muttered, swallowing a lump.

“Uncle Joe, it pushed open a secret wall panel like in the spookies, and then it went out.”

Joe scarcely seemed to hear her. He was examining his surroundings with a strained intensity, his eyes narrowed and alert. The studio resembled a big greenhouse, all win-



dow panes except where the sloping roof was crossed by a supporting bar of glowing metal a yard or more in width.

The panes were not transparent, but translucent. Beyond them was a weaving film of something he could not quite make out. Mist, maybe. He had already noticed that all the illumination came from outside, and was faintly greenish, and bright.

Now he was noticing other things. Tall, covered shapes standing at intervals around the studio.

Statues? Well, there were dried lumps of clay scattered around, as if there was a lot of sculpting going on. A few unfinished jobs would fit into the picture, right enough.

Silver shadows spilled down over the covered shapes from the faintly luminous panes. There was a pool of radiance on the floor where Betty Anne sat.

Joe Caffee shivered a little, because it was cold in the studio. The wrappings on the statues looked blubbery and wet. He wondered what the giraffe people used to cover the statues with. Oil-skin slickers from Davy Jones' locker? Bosh, he was letting his imagination run riot. More likely they had simply raided somebody's belfry, and covered the statues with the skin wings of glary-eyed bats.

Joe got unsteadily to his feet, and swayed towards one of the cloaked shapes.

"Maybe we won't like it when we've seen it," he muttered. "But we'll just have a look."

Reaching out, he gripped the wrapping firmly, and bared the shape beneath with an abrupt, vigorous jerk.

Betty Anne screamed.

Joe Caffee did not cry out, or even move his lips. He just stood still, not making a sound, with no expression at all on his face. But in his mind there began an inward shrinking from the ghastliness of what he saw.

Physically the shape which stood facing him was close enough to humanity to be terrifying on that account alone. It looked not unlike an enormous, mummified bullfrog,



agate-eyed, and with folds of dead-black flesh obscuring the lineaments of its face.

It was not quite a skelton, though. Yet so shrunken was it that every bone, joint and tendon in its quasihuman body was visible through its flesh. Its eyes were wide open, and fastened in an unblinking stare on Joe's face. But worse than all else, much, much worse—the thing was alive!

As Joe stood transfixed a veined lid sheathed its right eye for the barest instant. Then it blinked its left eye, and a shudder went through it. Unmistakably into its stare there crept an awareness of his presence. The awareness deepened, seemed to reach out toward him as though in alarm. Words formed in his brain. As clearly as though the creature had spoken with its lips he heard it speak.

“Get out quickly,” it said. “Get out while there is still time!”

He was aware of speech sounds from another direction, babbling, audible—and quite as insistent.

“Uncle Joe—oh, I'm awful afraid. Please, Uncle Joe, do something!”

Joe barely managed his trembling lips. But it was a necessary effort, it had to be made.

“Who are you?” was all he needed to say.

“We were powerful once—ruled this planet,” came the reply. “The hoppers are artists, live for pleasure. We are workers, builders. But that was long ago, before the climate changed.”

“The climate—changed?”

“It got drier. We built canals, but still our tissues shrank. Weakness, inertia crept upon us. Now the hoppers hold the whiphand. We're cut off from the light—no hope for us.”

The creature shuddered convulsively. “They won't let us die. They keep us dehydrated—deny us even—canal water. Suspended animation—metabolism slowed to the vanishing point. They've always hated us.”



Joe sucked in his breath, and tried to adjust to the flow of high-ampered thoughts which swirled in eddies from the frog creature's brain.

"We despised them because they were lazy, self-indulgent. But now they spend all their time—modeling us. They use the things we made, live in the cities we built, and—made statues of us."

"But w-why?" Joe asked in husky tones.

"It gives them pleasure, that's why. They like to model, and—all animal life disappeared when the climate changed. Now they'll model you—over and over and over—you'll be unable to resist. They'll drug you—keep you here. You've got to get out."

Wildly Joe stared about him.

"The wall is crystal thin," the creature said urgently. "Smash it, hurry!"

The creature was shaking convulsively. "They've gone to the smelting studio. When they come back it will be too late. Smash a pane—get out, get out!"

Joe's eyes were suddenly oddly moist. He tapped his forehead. "You know a lot about what goes on in here, eh? More than they do?"

"Yes, yes, our powers are greater than theirs. They can only hear your thoughts, but we can share your emotions."

Joe nodded, and reached out a hand. The frog creature's shoulder was so dry it rasped his palm. He clasped it notwithstanding.

"You know what we mean when we say somebody is a good guy?" he whispered.

For an instant the frog creature appeared puzzled. Then its eyes brightened. Joe was sure of one thing—a little of the wretchedness had gone out of its stare.

"I know exactly what you mean," the thing said. "We've met and exchanged hellos. Sort of instant liking, eh? Ships that pass in the night, dipping their colors."

"My buddies call me Joe," Joe gulped. "All I can say is—thanks, pal."



"That's all right, Joe. We're a lost race—the sun has set for us. But if you get away I'll have something to remember."

Joe Caffee nodded and swung about. Betty Anne was still sobbing, but the little golden statue seemed to be smiling.

He picked the statue up. It was heavy—just heavy enough to throw. He hefted it, and nodded at Betty Anne.

"Keep close to me, little lady," he said, softly. "Close like a shadow."

Joe's fingers tightened on the statue. His arm went back.

"So long, Joe. Good luck."

The silence in the studio was shattered by a sudden, splintering crash. Snatching up Betty Anne, Joe took her out of that place, across a road and out into a field of grass—long, purple grass. Then he set her down and got busy.

"Uncle Joe, what are you doing?" asked Betty Anne, after a while.

Crouching amid that weird-looking grass, Joe vouchsafed no reply. He had turned out his pockets, and on the soil beside him lay a jackknife, a spool of fine copper wire, a small bar magnet, a thimble, and a tarnished white cent.

The magnet and the thimble had served Joe well in his lean and hungry years. The magnet he used while fishing for coins under grates in cities, the thimble whenever his big toe came through his shoes, and he had a mending job on his hands. To say he had found a hundred uses for the jackknife would be an understatement. The spool of wire he had found and kept to thread through his suspenders and belt if, and when, they showed signs of wearing out. He liked steel pennies because sometimes they were worth ten of the copper ones, if the other fellow was not the noticing kind.

He was glad now he had acquired a fondness for gadgets. Suddenly and overwhelmingly glad as with swift, competent fingers he did things with the magnet, the knife, the thimble and the cent.



Did incredible things, so that Betty Anne stared goggle-eyed, all of her fright forgotten.

"There!" he said at last, and started twining the wire in delicate loops about the strange contrivance he had made of the knife, the dime, the thimble and the magnet.

"Uncle Joe, what is it?" asked Betty Anne.

"It's an apparatus for detecting the presence of electric currents," Joe said. "A bit on the makeshift side, but still a beautiful little solenoid-magnet arrangement. When Faraday performed his great experiment which led to the discovery of induced electromagnetic currents he used one just about as primitive."

"Uncle Joe!"

"Huh? Oh, I—I'm sorry if I scared you, little lady. It sort of slipped out."

"What did, Uncle Joe?"

"Things I know—like the number of molecules in a gram of hydrogen, and what happens when a standing wave of three nodes runs smack into an ultra-violet photon."

Betty Anne clapped her tiny hands. "Uncle Joe, you've had an education."

Joe grinned. "Well, since you've smoked me out I may as well own up to it. A sound one in physics, but I couldn't seem to magnetize my own alloy when it developed flaws and started slipping. I took the easy way down, little lady."

"Uncle Joe, say something that makes sense."

"Well, if the warp field is anywhere in the neighborhood, the flow of electric fluids through this magnet here should lead us to it. The nearer we come to it, the more intense the flow should become."

Joe Caffee stood up. He looked grotesque, overladen, the little gold statue under one arm, the electric-circuit apparatus in his hands.

"Come on, little lady," he said. "We've got to keep moving."



Long, purple grass again, parting and bending. The crunch of their footfalls on the harsh soil. The small, pea-sized moon shining down.

"Little lady, there's a current already," Joe exclaimed suddenly. "A current—and it's getting stronger!"

The ground had begun to slope, and they were mounting a hill that rose from the plain in purple billows. Higher they climbed and higher, their bodies tilted a little forward and then more sharply forward as the ascent became still steeper.

Eighty feet above the plain a patch of level countryside swept into view, grassy purple in all directions. At a hundred feet the vista was still grassy, but the color had gone out of it. Utterly drab it looked, as though a cloud of bleaching powder particles had descended upon it.

Rapidly they were approaching the summit when Betty Anne clutched his sleeve. "Uncle Joe, if that sculp of me is real gold, wouldn't it be worth a hundred million dollars?" she whispered.

"It would be worth plenty melted down," Joe grunted. "But it might be worth more to an art gallery. People who aren't all mean inside, like little girls in art, song and story."

"How could they, Uncle Joe?"

"Well, they do. In fact, a Victorian poet called Swinburne, once made up a little rhyme about it. This is what he wrote: 'If the golden-crested wren were a nightingale, why then, something seen and heard of men, might be half as sweet as when laughs a child of seven.' "

"Uncle Joe!" Betty Anne gasped. "Did you hear anything?"

If something from an umph-dimension had descended on Joe's shoulders and slithered down his back, it is doubtful if he could have turned his head about with greater celerity.

For an instant, as he stood listening, he was not sure,



and then—he had guessed right. The sound was far off—faint, but unmistakable. It sounded like the patter of hail-stones on a taut canvas sheet, but Joe knew the giraffe people were coming up over the crest of the hill toward them.

“Hoofbeats!” Betty Anne shrieked.

For one awful moment Joe Caffee stood as though frozen. Then he was in motion, with Betty Anne’s hand in his and her bobbing curls trailing in the wind.

“Keep climbing!” he yelled. Betty Anne needed no urging.

She reached the top of the hill ahead of him, and swung about like a small windmill, her arms flapping, her skirts whipping against her knees. Almost it seemed to Joe that he had floated up. Something seemed to take hold of him, and lift him toward the summit so that, when he found himself at her side, he was too startled to cry out.

Up the slope beneath them, a hundred long-necked creatures were bounding in twenty-foot leaps. So numerous were they that there was not a yard of hillside beneath that was not a springboard for a giraffe-shape descending or taking off. And though they traveled in leaps their hoofbeats made a continuous, clattering sound which vibrated against Joe’s skull until his senses reeled.

Nearer and nearer they approached. Directly behind him he heard a bell chiming, and far off in the distance he saw a city with domes all purple and glowing, and a snaking narrow watercourse which curled into the vague distance.

“Uncle Joe, help!”

Just in time Joe swung about. He could not see all of the giraffe creature, just its long neck sweeping toward her through the long grass in a swirl of dust.

Like a serpent it looked, and Joe’s spine crinkled, and his flesh went cold. He ripped the jackknife free of the tangle of wires with a single, violent jerk. He had never



thrown a knife before. Never before. But he felt calm and sure of himself.

Twang!

Joe dropped the magnet, and stared at the knife he had thrown. It was vibrating in a cloven hoof. Slumped in a grotesque heap, its haunches higher than its head, the giraffe creature was tearing at the blade with its long fingers, and whinnying like an injured horse.

"That was for Crinkly Face!" Joe flung the words out savagely. He took a slow step backward, and—everything began to whirl.

Betty Anne had been teetering saucer-eyed at his side.

Now she was shinning backward into a glimmering square of radiance, criss-crossed with bands of reddish light.

As she rose into the air the little golden statue was torn from Joe's clasp. With erratic jerks it went bumping over the ground as though in pursuit of its flesh-and-blood prototype, its head a blaze of shimmering flame.

For the barest instant Betty Anne and the golden child were silhouetted against the warp field, their outlines dimmed by depthless black. Then the red bands turned green, and all the air on the hilltop seemed to rush into the field, lifting Joe up and carrying him straight into the glimmering glory with his head lower than his seat. . . .

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## *The Peeper*

MIKE O'HARA approached his lodgings obliquely, his big shoulders hunched and his footsteps echoing hollowly along the narrow street. It was past midnight, but a few lights blinked cheerlessly here and there, and shadows scuttled out of doorways ahead of him to take refuge in alleyways which were faintly streaked with radiance from a dimmed-out bowling alley near the middle of the block.

Being in a pitiable state, O'Hara had to keep telling himself there was no danger he'd be set upon. The street was deserted, and he refused to believe that anything untoward would take advantage of his condition by leaping out of the shadows and fastening its teeth in his throat.

To be sure, *Michael* O'Hara lived in a dread of returning late home on a dark night, and finding himself with no redress but to leap screaming back from something with glassy eyes and bared teeth. But *Michael* O'Hara was a poet who wrote ghostly stories for the magazines and believed in evil things which waited beyond the lamplight for unwary pedestrians on deserted streets.

*Michael* O'Hara did truly believe in such things, but tonight he wasn't Michael. He was Mike. Plain Mike



O'Hara, and to hell with spirits when they didn't come out of bottles labeled eighty-five proof.

Tonight he wasn't spiritually on the spit. He was Mike O'Hara, hard-boiled, sceptical, and far from intoxicated, he told himself with fervor—even though his steps had carried him unevenly along the pavement, and he was now ascending the brownstone stoop of Mrs. Hammerslough's shabby-genteel, lavender-decade boarding-house with a treacherous feeling in the pit of his stomach.

There wasn't a sound in the darkness beneath him, and not a light showed in the darkness above. He had been humming, "Oh, my darlin'," but suddenly his throat seemed to constrict and his voice faded out, leaving him at the mercy of a silence which closed in upon him with the smothering force of a coffin lid being riveted to his face.

He climbed higher in the darkness, his shoulders jerking, his forehead studded with sweat. Up above the darkness was of a uniform quality except in one spot. At one side of the door and extending down over the stoop was an elongated patch of something which seemed to give off little weaving coruscations of light.

No, not light exactly. The something seemed enveloped in an odd, negative kind of brightness which kept moving about as he stared up at it. It was as though—as though a little to the left of the doorway the darkness had been ripped apart, and the emptiness beyond it was trying to shine through in fitful gleams.

Higher he climbed and higher. The stoop seemed to lengthen as he ascended, seemed to flow away beneath him, and he had all he could do to maintain his footing as he struggled to reach the top.

Finally, after ages so long his whole life seemed to pass in review before him, he found himself standing before the weaving something. It still looked a little like a rent in the darkness, a kind of ripped-out patch of negative radiance extending down over the stoop. But now he could



make out another something hanging in the depth of the glow: a dank, heavily scented something which looked not unlike a pigtail.

It was fastened with a little peg to the upper part of the brightness, and as he stared at it a shudder took hold of his spine.

“Good God,” he choked.

His vision had steadied a little and he could see now that the peg wasn't really attached to the brightness at all. It jutted from the weather-tarnished bronze bell plate on the left side of the doorway and the glow was a thing separate and apart, a kind of luminous cocoon which cradled the pigtail without encroaching on its substance in the least.

The pigtail was attached by the peg to the house itself, a little to the left of the old-fashioned doorbell. For an instant he stood staring at it, pushing out his lips like a schoolboy confronting an adult horror which he knew all about deep down inside and wasn't one bit afraid of.

Not one bit afraid of, because he wasn't Michael O'Hara tonight. He was just plain Mike and he'd even touch it, by heaven, to show his contempt for it. A tremor went through him, a tremor of resentment and anger that such a thing could be, and quite suddenly he was tugging at it with both hands, and—

“Sure, and it was a nasty fall you had, Mr. O'Hara,” a gruff voice said.

Groaning, Mike O'Hara picked himself up. He had no recollection of falling, only a kind of explosion in his brain which had seemingly lifted himself up and hurled him with violence from the stoop.

“Kilgallen, my head,” he groaned. “My head—”

The fact that he was picking himself up from the cold sidewalk with the help of a broad-shouldered police lieutenant had a sobering effect on him, for it was the first time he had ever needed to be assisted to his feet by the law, and it made him feel that he had sunk very low.



"Sure, and it is a little tight you are," the officer chuckled. "You were no doubt celebrating your daughter's wedding, Mr. O'Hara?"

"I have no daughter, Kilgallen," O'Hara groaned. "I'm only thirty-four."

"Ah, what a pity."

The officer put a steadying arm about O'Hara's shoulder and chuckled again. "A daughter steadies a man, Mr. O'Hara. Come now, up we go!"

"Hair, Kilgallen," O'Hara groaned. "Hung up to dry. Two long locks of hair, braided like a pigtail. They were wet, Kilgallen, and—"

"Come now, you can sleep it off. A pigtail, was it. Well, well, well—"

"*Nailed* to the door, Kilgallen. The Greeks—"

Lieutenant Kilgallen nodded sympathetically. "So you've been tanking up at Joe Saripolos' place, eh? Well, I'll say this for Joe. He sure knows how to mix them."

"No, Kilgallen, no. Joe's a modern Greek and it's an ancient custom I'm talking about. It was an ancient Greek custom to cut a lock of hair from a dead man's head, and nail it outside the door, in token there was a corpse in the house. They used wooden nails, Kilgallen, and—"

O'Hara never knew how he arrived in his room. He was sure that Kilgallen hadn't assisted him all the way up, because he remembered parting from the police officer in the lower hallway with a muttered, "Thanks a lot, Kilgallen. I'll be okay now."

But he couldn't remember ascending the stairs, or locking himself in his room. Leaning against the door to make sure it *was* locked, and breathing heavily, he told himself there was only one sensible thing to do.

If he wanted to hold on to his sanity the only sensible thing was to dissolve three aspirins in a glass of water, kick off his shoes and assume a recumbent position. He was home now—and safe. If he slept it off there was a



chance he wouldn't wake up screaming. Not an even chance, perhaps, but a chance, a chance—

He was crossing unsteadily to the bathroom when he saw the still, grey figure stretched out at full length on his bed.

The figure lay on the bed with something that looked like a half-consumed loaf of bread between its hands. Its arms were crossed at the wrists, and its legs were stretched out stiff and straight. There were sandals on its feet, and the flesh between the straps had a hideous waxen look.

The face of the figure also had a waxen look, but there was about it something beautiful and strange which even the ghastly pallor could not efface. There was nothing effeminate about the face, and yet more than the beauty of mortality seemed to rest upon it, so that a man looking upon it for the first time might think himself in the presence of a saint.

Later he might notice a Satanic aspect such as saints do not possess, and come to realize that the face was that of a great poet who could summon spirits from the vasty deep.

O'Hara knew of course that the still figure was not his *present* self. The still figure had graduated from Dublin University with great, eternal thoughts hovering at the back of his head. The still figure had worn his hair long, and had looked a little ridiculous walking down the street.

But he had written stories like dew-drenched spider webs, prismatic and strange and with a little gruesome wrench at the end which made people happy deep down inside. Very sensitive and imaginative people, of course, because only such people deserved to be made happy in precisely that way.

With black horror clutching at his throat, Mike O'Hara stared down at the still cold figure of his younger self.

"Mike O'Hara, your salary is forty thousand a year and you are the most brilliant keyhole columnist east of Chi-



cago," said a terrible accusing voice which seemed to come from deep inside O'Hara's own head.

"I—I—"

"Your column is well enough on its way, Mike O'Hara. But need you have killed *him* because you could no longer abide his dreams?"

"Oh, God, I—"

"You killed him, Mike O'Hara. As surely as though you had plunged a knife into his heart!"

Mike O'Hara suddenly felt his knees give way beneath him. With a strangled sob he sank down at the foot of the bed, and for an instant there was nothing but a dazzling whiteness swirling round and round inside his head. Then there was a dimming of the whiteness and then a greyness in which nothing moved and finally a blackness in which everything was blotted out.

### *Morning Edition*

God, what a hangover he had! Just inserting a sheet of paper in the typewriter brought the sweat out on him, and his hands shook, and he had an impulse to send out for a pint of bourbon and mix himself the biggest pick-up on record.

Waking upon the floor had been bad enough, but getting swayingly to his feet and finding that he had slept a part of the night on his bed without realizing it had given him the worst jolt of all. His long, angular body had left an impression on the sheets which he had taken great pains to smooth out before sending for an expressman.

Well, he had accomplished one thing. He had overcome his sentimental attachment to Mrs. Hammerslough's crumbly old brownstone and was now ensconced at the Ritz, where he would probably remain for the duration. At least, his trunks were there, and he'd soon be unpacking them.

And even if the herd of pink elephants *had* stampeded over him he was going to get his column out on schedule. He was very conscientious about his column, and he took



a personal pride in it, and he'd be damned if he'd allow himself to skid along on his laurels.

Strands of hair hung up to dry on his doorstep, a corpse in his bed. He—he was lucky to be alive.

Acute alcoholism was no joke. Only last week a man of seventy out in New Jersey had accepted a challenge to drink a full pint in twenty minutes. It had been a very foolish thing to do, because he *might* have lived to be a hundred and six.

Better get on with it, boy! You're drawing eight hundred a week for a column twelve inches tall. If you don't get on with it someone else will.

The corpse of *himself*! Once he had been so thoroughly skizzled he had smashed a window in a subway train while reciting Swinburne's *Faustine* to the girl on the next strap. But never had anything so ghastly as a still cold heebie-jeebe resembling his younger self parked itself in the middle of his bed.

Shuddering, he planted both his hands on his typewriter in approved touch system fashion, and began to twiddle his fingers. The clicking which ensued placed in capitals halfway down the page *Broadway Vignettes by Mike O'Hara*, and a paragraph which read:

What after-Pearl Harbor deb gave what buck private playboy the runaround, oh, so recently, at the Pelican Club? And why did Peggy Sanderson of the Park Avenue and Palm Beach Sandersons, treat herself to a new escort at the very same table? And whose face, and I do mean face, will be red when he reads what your columnist—

He stopped typing abruptly and stared out of the window, one side of his face sagging down over his collar. When he read over what he had written he couldn't put his finger on a single phrase that wasn't worse than corny.

With an oath he tore out the sheet, crumpled it, and tossed it out the window. Perhaps a new start—

His jaw muscles twitching, he fed another sheet to the machine, and covered it with writing which had welled up



from his subconscious so rapidly it *had* to be good. His fingers could hardly move fast enough. Almost he wept with relief as the lovely words came.

"Boy, you sure can write," he muttered to himself, elevating what he had written above the carriage and reading it over, slowly. It was—lousy.

Groaning, he arose and walked out of his office. The rewrite din almost deafened him as he crossed the city room between earnest young men who were turning out flawless prose at a small fraction of his weekly salary.

He felt like climbing up on a chair and immersing his head in the cool green water cooler on the far side of the big, crowded city room. Approaching the cooler, he went through all the motions of doing that in his mind. A parched throat seemed to reach out ahead of his hands for the water he was presently siphoning into a lily cup.

Quaffing the cool, bubbling drink made him feel lots better immediately. He had thought up a substitute column for the lousy one he had left in his typewriter and was turning from the water cooler when—he saw it. It was nothing much, really, just one long, black hair on the sleeve of a coat which he had neglected to brush after wearing it the previous evening.

It was nothing much, but his own hair was grey, not black, and he could tell by the sheen of his hair that it had come from a much younger head.

Somehow he knew then what was expected of him. His face streaked with damp, his nose twitching, he returned across the city room to his office, and stood for an instant with his hand on a doorknob that seemed to twist in his clasp.

For an eternity he stood there, while his whole life seemed to pass in review as it had on the previous evening. Then a convulsive shudder shook him, and he opened the door wide.

Although the something which was sitting on his desk had planted both its hands on his typewriter in approved



touch system fashion he could tell at a glance that it wasn't human. It hadn't any clothes on, and he could see right through it, and he knew that it was a spirit, and—it was watching him.

It was watching him out of cavernous eyes that seemed to grow larger and larger, and suddenly it was getting up, and wiping its claws on its shaggy flanks.

It did not utter a sound, but he knew that it was annoyed because it had soiled its moist but hueless claws on a heavily inked typewriter ribbon. He could tell, he knew.

The air about him seemed to congeal, freezing him solid. As though through a pane of ice he saw the something flap its stoat-like ears, and ascend straight up towards the ceiling, its arms pressed to its side.

In all his life he had never wanted so badly to scream, but he couldn't at all. Not even when the ceiling broke into bubbling froth, and the long legs of the creature left a hideous swirling in its wake.

Quite suddenly the ceiling became solid again, the ice dissolved, and a whispering swept across the office, as though an artery into Nowhere had begun to disgorge invisible elves.

"Hustle this down to the city room, little brother," a tiny voice shrilled. "It is the obituary of *Michael* O'Hara, written in person by the Peeper. He's the most accomplished keyhole columnist on *our* side, but for once he has forgotten to be clever."

"Was that really the Peeper, dark sisterkin? That uncouth, shaggy—"

"It would be a mistake to hold his appearance against him, little brother. When he is deeply moved he writes cadenced and flawless prose—like a silver river striking down to the sea between the cliffs of Inishowen. How he must have loved our Michael!"

"Poor, poor Michael. For three days he will lie in state—"



"Where, dark sisterkin?"

"Why, at the Royal Coach Inn on the Queen's Highway, of course."

"But otherwise known as Mrs. Hammerslough's boardinghouse."

"Only to mortals, little brother. And to Mike O'Hara, perhaps, who is standing there dead."

"Standing there dead?"

"*Dead?*"

"But see how he is trembling, little sisterkin! Surely a dead Mortal—"

"When a Mortal's young self lies in state the rest of him is but sound and fury signifying nothing."

"You mean—he will be pursued and cut down, little sisterkin?"

"Of course. The stalk *must* be severed when the wheat is dead."

It seemed to Mike O'Hara as though all the animation had been sucked out of his body, and that even the power to breathe had departed from his lungs.

But though his body felt like a hollow shell his vision was like that of a man experimenting with a new pair of glasses at the foot of the gallows. The brightness, the sharpness of everything seemed to increase, and for an instant it was given to him to see—five shadowy, misshapen little figures sitting astraddle his typewriter, swinging their legs and chattering away like evil gnomes in a doll house.

For perhaps five seconds he saw them. Then a mistiness seemed to swirl up over them, blotting them from view. With a strangled sob he turned, his hand fumbling for a doorknob that seemed to elude his grasp and recede from him through a shimmering veil of mist. . . .

He had no recollection of stumbling through the mist and out across the city room, and down two flights of stairs to the street. But he must have done so, for he presently



found himself running. Hatless, coatless and along a street that seemed to converge upon him from all sides.

Unmistakably the street was converging and assuming the aspects of a charnel vault with dank, dripping walls, and the people he passed turned toward him dead, fleshless faces. He wanted to scream and couldn't, and he had to run faster to escape from something that was pursuing him over the pavement.

He heard the something behind him, and tried to turn and couldn't, and then he was backing away from it up a long, dark alley and it was pursuing him with relentless speed.

"No, no!" he shrieked, backing faster and faster away as though a suction had seized hold of his coattails and was pulling him in a direction where everything was covered with graveyard mold.

It might have been better if he had not tried to escape, but had remained with his feet firmly planted on the dark, moldy earth, for then it would have happened more quickly, and he would have been spared the torment of being overtaken at the bottom of a circular pit choked with corpses, and filled with the loathsome titterings of little dry-fleshed shapes which could only have been ghouls.

He saw the scythe for an instant, looming bright and sharp above the pallid charnel glow which hovered over the pit. For an instant he saw too the thing that had pursued him through the shadows—saw its huge bony hands and the monstrous darkness where its face should have been.

Then—the scythe swung down toward him, and he felt the thrust of something that seemed to lift his head, and a wetness coughing up from his lungs.

He felt nothing more.

### *Final Edition*

Dr. Hillary stood staring down at the dead columnist



with troubled eyes. Out beyond the city room typewriters clattered and telephones buzzed.

The young interne knew, of course, that the life of a newspaper took precedence over the death of even such a famous columnist as Mike O'Hara. But it seemed a little irreverent somehow, and it shocked him.

The city editor had closed the door, and Hillary was free now to speak his mind without exposing himself to a white blaze of publicity. The publicity would come and be a feather in his cap, for Mike O'Hara had been found dead under unusual circumstances—hunched in his chair before his typewriter, his arms outflung as though to ward off the blows of an invisible assailant.

The publicity would be fine for a young interne arriving in a hastily summoned ambulance a half-hour after O'Hara had been found like that. But now he wanted to speak his mind in a quiet way to just one intelligent individual, and the city editor seemed both intelligent and sympathetic.

"People *have* been scared to death," he said. "I don't claim it's common, but it *has* happened. There's a sudden shock, and the body tries to build up a foil of courage too—well, instantly. Too much adrenalin is poured into the bloodstream, and—"

"But what could have scared him?" the city editor wanted to know.

Hillary shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. Fright can be subjective, you know. Something he imagined—"

"Like that discoloration around his throat," the city editor suggested. "Now that we've started that line of thought, why not follow it through? He imagined there was a killer in here with a noose, and it made such an impression on him it did something to his throat."

Hillary returned the other's stare unflinchingly. "I'm



almost sure that's a birthmark, but, of course—it mightn't be. There are a dozen post-mortem appearances it could be, all orthodox. There's no evidence of foul play, if that's what you're hinting at."

"You're not a medical examiner, Doc."

"No, I'm not. But I can assure you—"

"And you're not a psychiatrist," the city editor said. As he spoke he tapped the smudged sheet of paper which projected from the dead man's typewriter.

"Look for Michael O'Hara below the cliffs of Inishowen, where the silver lark takes wing," he quoted. "Look for Mike O'Hara here, where he shall run from the Reaper, and be cut down."

"It's signed: 'The Peeper.'"

"What are you suggesting?" Hillary asked.

The city editor frowned. "Well, that's pure gibberish, isn't it? It sounds like the ravings of a lunatic. Mightn't O'Hara have had a brainstorm, tried to strangle himself, and succeeded in—well, fracturing his larynx, or something?"

"It is physically impossible for a man to do that," Hillary said, with a wry grimace. "Besides, his larynx *isn't* fractured."

The city editor seemed not to hear him. He was staring intently down at the sheet of paper which contained the lines he had just characterized as the ravings of a lunatic.

"Say—that's strange!"

"Huh? What is?" Hillary wanted to know.

"Why, that smudge there. It looks exactly like a—a claw."

"Oh, nonsense," Hillary said, reaching over and ripping the sheet from the carriage.

For an instant he stared down at it, and then he stared at the city editor, and then back at the sheet again, all the blood draining from his face.



“Good Lord,” he choked.

Between his shaking hands young Dr. Hillary held a sheet of paper on which there was not so much as a single typed line.



## *The Hounds of Tindalos*

"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a medieval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles, and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprised to discover that he had been studying the mathematical formula of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the sombre ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about medieval sorcery and



witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right*, and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong*."

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected*."

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of course not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the postivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time*. That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it cannot demonstrate. But you—"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I



would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend—”

“What?”

“The fourth dimension.”

“Theosophical rubbish!”

“Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one.”

“A new drug?”

“It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time*.”

“I do not understand.”

“Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now*. Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already*. We cannot perceive their existence because we cannot enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist.”

“I think I understand,” I murmured.

“It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end*.”

“And you think this new drug will help you?”

“I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I cannot wait. I must



*see.*" His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall pre-



pare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall approach the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception. Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystics I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually. I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

“But with your aid, I believe that I can recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do* succeed”—his eyes were strangely luminous—“*time will exist for me no longer!*”

He sat down abruptly. “I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?”

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

“And a pad, Frank?”

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. “I emphatically disapprove of this experiment,” I muttered. “You’re taking a frightful risk.”

“Don’t be an asinine old woman!” he admonished. “Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts.”

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the sec-



onds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I rose quickly and moved towards him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped," he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily. It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids, but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap—a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I cannot tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "*I see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I see *everything*. All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all ages, all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely grey deserts,



and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer futuristic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races—a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming Asia, and the Neanderthals with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achæans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young. I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *hastati*. A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flower-girls scream '*Ave Caesar*' as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thyme-scented gardens of Nero, and I watch with amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtesans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice*. I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice, and the hem of her garment brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and



run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously*. I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves*. There is *curved time*, and *angular time*. The beings that exist in angular time cannot enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles—strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmers had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through unearthly angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it."

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried. "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond—"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror—"things that I cannot distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no



bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I carried him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whiskey," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."



When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned.

His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No words in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene form which is occasionally found engraved on the ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery."

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable *deed* was done in the beginning. Before time, the *deed*, and from the deed—"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The seeds of the deed move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the twentieth century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. "*The Hounds of Tindalos!*"

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician cannot help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank, I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side*. I stood on the pale grey shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them*."

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their



lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I cannot be certain. *But I heard them breathe.* Indescribably for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

“But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst for that in us which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil.

“They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no morals, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angles; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally.”

I rose and searched for my hat. “I’m dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers,” I said, as I walked towards the door. “But I don’t intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I’ll send my physician to see you. He’s an elderly, kindly chap and he won’t be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you’ll respect his advice. A week’s rest in a good sanatorium should benefit you immeasurably.”

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would re-



sult in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

*En route* to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water."

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from—Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the stepladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he



affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps—tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you cannot conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *super-human* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take charge of him immediately."

*The following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette for July 3, 1928:*



**EARTHQUAKE SHAKES FINANCIAL DISTRICT**

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (designed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

**OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST****HORRIBLE CRIME IN CENTRAL SQUARE***Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers*

At 9 a.m. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwick and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented furnished to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 a.m. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette*. The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when



it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart went cold within him, and the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five minutes.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in context that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks



knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their tongues—ahhhh—"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points to the unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

*Report of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:*  
MY DEAR MR. DOUGLAS,

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substance known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without



enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i.e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

*Excerpt from The Secret Watchers by the late Halpin Chalmers:*

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Doels. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. *It* moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

THE END



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