

TERROR



*in the
modern vein*



*Macabre Stories
edited by*

**DONALD A.
WOLLHEIM**

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Startling Tales of the Macabre!

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*For my mother-
In a turbulent world:
a Rose and a rock.*

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INTRODUCTION

GHOST stories today have achieved a pattern almost as stylized as the sonnet. Derived as these tales are from the legends and superstitions of an older, more primitive world, they are based upon a type of fear induction which was the outgrowth of a form of existence mankind has grown away from. This is the fear of the single individual alone in a world whose natural forces were unknown and unpredictable, whose geography was not mapped, whose beliefs, religious and social, were still heavily steeped in the ancient animism of the original savages.

In such a world, sparsely populated by modern standards, the roads and streets were unlit at night (or lit but poorly), the rural countryside was replete with wolves, bears, and the sounds of prowlers in the darkness, the landscape dominated by huge ugly piles of stone set in the most inaccessible places. In these forbidding gray structures, unheated and almost windowless, either dwelled or once dwelled cruel men, men who set themselves apart and above the plodders in the fields, men who, as lords, exacted tribute, sat in cold judgment, and fended forth in frightening armour to beat off the attacks of marauders from over the mountains. In the cellars of these awesome castles were evil holes wherein many a wretched man or woman had screamed their lives away. In the castle halls, murder and bloodshed were regular happenings.

Even after these castles had fallen into ruin, after the last bear and wolf had been cornered and torn to bits, the natives of the region never forgot the terrors that had been once realities. Their land was much the same, their nights as dark, their rulers as fickle and dangerous. To these people, it was easy and natural to believe that the inherent spirits of stone and wood still lingered, that they took on the shapes of ghosts howling their pain in the night, of malignant barons, dead but still athirst for blood. That in the darkness of the unlit roads and fields still roamed, if not wolves, then werewolves and vampires and other night-gaunts. Witchcraft and wizardry, fairy and gnome, zombie and ghoul, all were credible because all the borders were still not charted, fear of the foreigner still prevailed, and there was illiteracy and ignorance of the growing but cloistered world of science; all were still primarily the predominant facts of the average life.

Out of this mass of lore, out of the folktales and old wives' stories, out of fragmentary memories of outlawed paganism, out of garbled versions of semi-forgotten history, out of misunderstood natural phenomena, grew the entire pattern of ghost fiction. And as our cities grew, as our civilization began to emerge into the industrial pattern, much of this lore was translated into literature, worked into a storytelling formula laid against the kind of surroundings the new listeners could picture.

From haunted castles to haunted country estates is an easy transition. From the bloody ducal dungeon to the mysterious stain in a deserted London residence is a short step. The vampire that frightened the Transylvanian peasant became the blood-seeking spectre of a British seaside

tavern. Because men still felt alone and their streets were still ill lit and their knowledge still sketchy, these fear patterns held their validity.

The ghost story in all its stylized variety has been with us in a finished form since the end of the nineteenth century. Dozens of thick volumes of these tales have been assembled, and they have featured the by-lines of many skilled authors, yet, in all things, they are limited to the lore of a bygone era. They follow timeworn footsteps in their format, they must make you believe in that which science, modern society, and the modern practice of religion have rejected. That they succeed so often is a tribute to the skill of the writers.

In all truth, these stories are obsolete. Though we may find some pleasure in them, we cannot truly believe. Shall we cringe before the whining anger of some duke three hundred years dead because he was, let us suppose, murdered and unavenged, when today unavenged murder is a commonplace? How can we who have lived through a recent decade wherein six million people were cold-bloodedly tortured and slaughtered, without trial or guilt, at the whim of a tyrannical bigot - how can we take seriously the petty ire of one ancient and forgotten ghost? How can we who live in a world where dozens of great cities were bombed and burned by remote killers in a midnight sky seriously acknowledge the night-time shenanigans of a headless horseman? How can we whose streets are a-prowl with psychotics, thrill slayers, and drug addicts whose actions fill the police records daily with new lists of unmotivated malignancies, take fright at the antics of a witch's curse? How can we condone the personal thirst of a Dracula when everywhere there are growing blood banks against expected future calamities?

No, the ghost story is obsolete, out of date, dead for serious consumption. But the fear of the unknown, the terror of the world about us, that is not dead. We have made a new sort of world, different from the old, and in this new world there are terrors, too. We accept the slaughter of millions by government fiat, we shrug off the death of cities overnight, we frown upon but admit the inevitability of warfare by pestilence and radioactive dust. We walk about our business, knowing that we are doomed in the light of A- and H- bombs to come. This is part of our everyday life, and against it we project our personal dreams, our family affairs, and our daily bread-winning.

We are as human as our ancestors. In our hearts the primitive animism still lingers. We create new forms of terror, we build up a whole new demonology derived from science and quasi-science, we propound new witchcrafts derived from political soothsaying, we shudder in our souls at the very monstrosities we have found protection in.

In the field of literature, in the ranks of storytelling, there has been a slow awareness of this new demonology. Restricted by the fixed patterns of the ghost story, this has had considerable difficulty breaking through. The view was obscured by old premises. Nonetheless it manifested itself. One of the first breakthroughs in the effort to create a terror story proper to our times resulted in the whole field of science-fiction, the subsequent development of which has quite outgrown and mainly shed this early facet of its creation. In the writings of H.G. Wells at the dawn of our century, although the premise might be scientific prognostication, the atmosphere and effect was the creation of terror, as in the inhuman clanking, bellowing world of *The Sleeper Awakes*, or the throaty cries on Dr. Moreau's vivisectional island. That the groundwork for a new demonology was being laid is overshadowed by the towering mushroom of space-time derring-do that also grew from these Wellsian roots. But the new century called forth the new fear patterns, and they found their way into the writings of others.

Arthur Machen achieved a partial synthesis of the old form and the new in his long stories of London. Against the background of a modern city with its buses and plumbing, Machen whispered of the survival of the forgotten mythology. The remnants and shreds of the little people, the witches and the curses, still lingered on, tucked away among the stones and cellars of our new civilization. But even Machen revealed an awareness of what a losing battle these all-but-forgotten holdovers were having. There had always to be a relic, something tangible from the days before there was a London, before they could manifest themselves. They could not, and in Machen, they did not manifest themselves in *new* things.

Here and there, after Machen, stories popped up based upon the new things, upon the terrors of psychology, the terrors of the new monsters of machine and gas, of state and society, of smoke and dust, of radio wave and telescope, of the ever more menacing future. Here at last were the origins of the new fear-story pattern, the abandonment of the foolish ghost for the evocation of far subtler modern menaces.

I first became conscious of this new form of fear fiction back in 1937 when I first read Wells's *The Croquet Player*. Against the booming mania of the war drums, Wells struck a responsive note. Here, he wrote, is a new and real ghost, derived from that which haunts us today rather than that which haunted our great-grandfathers'. The eerie atmosphere of this short novel, one of Wells's last great imaginative works, rang true. But it could never be correlated to accepted ghost-story formulae. From that point on, as a collector and connoisseur of fantasy fiction, I earmarked similar stories, tales that reflected terror in the modern vein.

Here was Franz Kafka, writing his novels of the little man being torn asunder by torturers and forces he could not even glimpse. Here, on a different level, was H. P. Lovecraft, writing stories seemingly in the ghost tradition yet insistently deriving his demons from the marginalia of astronomy and geology, dressing them in robes woven from science-fiction. Here were Fritz Leiber and Ray Bradbury and Philip M. Fisher moving through modern scenes and finding terrors growing there that had never grown on earth before.

In fact, here were stories that belonged to our own times, not to bygone scenes. These terrors are different from those that had once been known. Rather than the physical entities of superstitious peasantry, there are far more likely to be psychological subtleties, *wrongnesses* of thought and being, rather than substances. No one can yet fix and systematize the new demonology, for it is still evolving and its forms are unlike all others. It may be manifested by an absence rather than a presence, by a shadow instead of a substance, by a darkness instead of a dawn.

We are living in a most strange world, a world we made ourselves. No ancestors ever shared this modern scene. In it we must continue to plunge headlong forwards because we are no longer capable of turning back. Our peace is more tense than any peace ever before, our wars more inconceivably horrible, our cities more deadly than the most trackless jungle, our homes more luxurious than the most fabled palaces, and our future more explosively uncertain than all those our ancestors faced.

In this we create new ghosts, we find new terrors, not to shout the realities of our terrible days, but to whisper of subtler madness. In this book, I have sought to gather together for the first time some of these stories of *Terror in the Modern Vein*. You will not find a single ghost, werewolf, or vampire in these pages. Instead you will find something of that which haunts our times now. You will meet the unnamed which is among us today.

- DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

THEY

by Robert Heinlein

Who is there among us who has not occasionally entertained the suspicion that everything, save one's own self, is other than what it seems? And how, if once we begin to suspect that the world is merely an elaborate play put on for personal benefit for some inexplicably dark reason, can we ever hope to prove it? Robert Heinlein tells the story of a suspicious man who set out to check the matter for himself.

THEY would not let him alone.

They never would let him alone. He realized that that was part of the plot against him - never to leave him in peace, never to give him a chance to mull over the lies they had told him, time enough to pick out the flaws, and to figure out the truth for himself.

That damned attendant this morning! He had come busting in with his breakfast tray, waking him, and causing him to forget his dream. If only he could remember that dream -

Someone was unlocking the door. He ignored it.

"Howdy, old boy. They tell me you refused your breakfast?" Dr. Hayward's professionally kindly mask hung over his bed.

"I wasn't hungry."

"But we can't have that. You'll get weak, and then I won't be able to get you well completely. Now get up and get your clothes on and I'll order an egnog for you. Come on, that's a good fellow!"

Unwillingly, but still less willing at that moment to enter into any conflict of wills, he got out of bed and slipped on his bathrobe. "That's better," Hayward approved. "Have a cigarette?"

"No, thank you."

The doctor shook his head in a puzzled fashion. "Darned if I can figure you out. Loss of interest in physical pleasures does not fit your type of case."

"What is my type of case?" he inquired in flat tones.

"Tut! Tut!" Hayward tried to appear roguish. "If medicos told their professional secrets, they might have to work for a living."

"What is my type of case?"

"Well - the label doesn't matter, does it? Suppose you tell me. I really know nothing about your case as yet. Don't you think it is about time you talked?"

"I'll play chess with you."

"All right, all right. Hayward made a gesture of impatient concession. "We've played chess every day for a week. If you will talk, I'll play chess."

What could it matter? If he was right, they already understood perfectly that he had discovered their plot; there was nothing to be gained by concealing the obvious. Let them try to argue him out of it. Let the tail go with the hide! To hell with it!

He got out the chessmen and commenced setting them up. "What do you know of my case so far?"

"Very little. Physical examination negative. Past history, negative. High intelligence, as shown by your record in school and your success in your profession. Occasional fits of moodiness, but nothing exceptional. The only positive information was the incident that caused you to come here for treatment."

"To be brought here, you mean. Why should it cause comment?"

"Well, good gracious, man - if you barricade yourself in your room and insist that your wife is plotting against you, don't you expect people to notice?"

"But she *was* plotting against me - and so are you. White, or black?"

"Black - it's your turn to attack. Why do you think we are 'plotting against you'?"

"It's an involved story, and goes way back into my early child-hood. There was an immediate incident, however -" He opened by advancing the white king's knight to KB3. Hayward's eyebrows raised.

"You make a piano attack?"

"Why not? You know that it's not safe for me to risk a gambit with you."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and answered the opening. "Suppose we start with your early childhood. It may shed more light than more recent incidents. Did you feel that you were being persecuted as a child?"

"No!" He half rose from his chair. "When I was a child I was sure of myself. I knew then, I tell you; I knew! Life was worth while, and I knew it. I was at peace with myself and my surroundings. Life was good and I was good, and I assumed that the creatures around me were like myself."

"And weren't they?"

"Not at all! Particularly the children. I didn't know what viciousness was until I was turned loose with other 'children.' The little devils! And I was expected to be like them and play with them."

The doctor nodded. "I know. The herd compulsion. Children can be pretty savage at times."

"You've missed the point. This wasn't any healthy roughness; these creatures were *different* - not like myself at all. They *looked* like me, but they were *not* like me. If I tried to say anything to one of them about anything that mattered to me, all I could get was a stare and a scornful laugh. Then they would find some way to punish me for having said it."

Hayward nodded. "I see what you mean. How about grownups?"

"That is somewhat different. Adults don't matter to children at first - or, rather, they did not matter to me. They were too big, and they did not bother me, and they were busy with things that did not enter into my considerations. It was only when I noticed that my presence affected them that I began to wonder about them."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, they never did the things when I was around that they did when I was not around."

Hayward looked at him carefully. "Won't that statement take quite a lot of justifying? How do you know what they did when you weren't around?"

He acknowledged the point. "But I used to catch them just stopping. If I came into a room, the conversation would stop suddenly, and then it would pick up about the weather or something equally inane. Then I took to hiding and listening and looking. Adults did not behave the same way in my presence as out of it."

"Your move, I believe. But see here, old man - that was when you were a child. Every child passes through that phase. Now that you are a man, you must see the adult point of view. Children *are* strange creatures and have to be protected - at least, we do protect them - from many adult interests. There is a whole code of conventions in the matter that -"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted impatiently, "I know all that. Nevertheless, I noticed enough and remembered enough that was never clear to me later. And it put me on my guard to notice the next thing."

"Which was?" He noticed that the doctor's eyes were averted as he adjusted a castle's position.

"The things I saw people doing and heard them talking about were never of any importance. They *must* be doing something else."

"I don't follow you."

"You don't choose to follow me. I'm telling this to you in exchange for a game of chess."

"Why do you like to play chess so well?"

"Because it is the only thing in the world where I can see all the factors and understand all the rules. Never mind - I saw all around me this enormous plant, cities, farms, factories, churches, schools, homes, railroads, luggage, roller coasters, trees, saxophones, libraries, people and animals. People that looked like me and who should have felt very much like me, if what I was told was the truth. But what did they appear to be doing? "They went to work to earn the money to buy the food to get the strength to go to work to earn the money to buy the food to get the strength to go to work to get the strength to buy the food to earn the money to go -' until they fell over dead. Any slight variation in the basic pattern did not matter, for they always fell over dead. And everybody tried to tell me that I should be doing the same thing. I knew better!"

The doctor gave him a look apparently intended to denote helpless surrender and laughed. "I can't argue with you. Life does look like that, and maybe it is just that futile. But it is the only life we have. Why not make up your mind to enjoy it as much as possible?"

"Oh, no!" He looked both sulky and stubborn. "You can't peddle nonsense to me by claiming to be fresh out of sense. How do I know? Because all this complex stage setting, all these swarms of actors, could not have been put here just to make idiot noises at each other."

Some other explanation, but not that one. An insanity as enormous, as complex, as the one around me had to be planned. I've found the plan!"

"Which is?"

He noticed that the doctor's eyes were again averted.

"It is a play intended to divert me, to occupy my mind and confuse me, to keep me so busy with details that I will not have time to think about the meaning. You are all in it, every one of you." He shook his finger in the doctor's face. "Most of them may be helpless automatons, but you're not. You are one of the conspirators. You've been sent in as a trouble-shooter to try to force me to go back to playing the role assigned to me!"

He saw that the doctor was waiting for him to quiet down.

"Take it easy," Hayward finally managed to say. "Maybe it is all a conspiracy, but why do you think that you've been singled out for special attention? Maybe it is a joke on all of us. Why couldn't I be one of the victims as well as yourself?"

"Got you!" He pointed a long finger at Hayward. "That is the essence of the plot. All of these creatures have been set up to look like me in order to prevent me from realizing that I was the centre of the arrangements. But I have noticed the key fact, the mathematically inescapable fact, that I am unique. Here am I, sitting on the inside. The world extends outward from me. I am the centre -"

"Easy, man, easy! Don't you realize that the world looks that way to me, too. We are each the centre of the universe -"

"Not so! That is what you have tried to make me believe, that I am just one of millions more just like me. Wrong! If they were like me, then I could get into communication with them. I can't. I have tried and tried and I can't. I've sent out my inner thoughts, seeking some one other being who has them, too. What have I gotten back? Wrong answers, jarring incongruities, meaningless obscenity. I've tried, I tell you. God! - how I've tried! But there is nothing out there to speak to me - nothing but emptiness and otherness!"

"Wait a minute. Do you mean to say that you think there is nobody home at my end of the line? Don't you believe that I am alive and conscious?"

He regarded the doctor soberly. "Yes, I think you are probably alive, but you are one of the others - my antagonists. But you have set thousands of others around me whose faces are blank. *not lived in*, and whose speech is a meaningless reflex of noise."

"Well, then, if you concede that I am an ego, why do you insist that I am so very different from yourself?"

"Why? Wait!" He pushed back from the chess table and strode over to the wardrobe, from which he took a violin case.

While he was playing, the lines of suffering smoothed out of his face and his expression took a relaxed beatitude. For a while he recaptured the emotions, but not the knowledge, which he had possessed in dreams. The melody proceeded easily from proposition to proposition with inescapable, unforced logic. He finished with a triumphant statement of the essential thesis and turned to the doctor. "Well?"

"Hm-m-m." He seemed to detect an even greater degree of caution in the doctor's manner. "It's an odd bit, but remarkable. Pity you didn't take up the violin seriously. You could have

made quite a reputation. You could even now. Why don't you do it? You could afford to, I believe."

He stood and stared at the doctor for a long moment, then shook his head as if trying to clear it. "It's no use," he said slowly, "no use at all. There is no possibility of communication. I am alone." He replaced the instrument in its case and returned to the chess table. "My move, I believe?"

"Yes. Guard your queen."

He studied the board. "Not necessary. I no longer need my queen. Check."

The doctor interposed a pawn to parry the attack.

He nodded. "You use your pawns well, but I have learned to anticipate your play. Check again - and mate, I think."

The doctor examined the new situation. "No," he decided, "no - not quite." He retreated from the square under attack. "Not checkmate - stalemate at the worst. Yes, another stalemate."

He was upset by the doctor's visit. He *couldn't* be wrong, basically, yet the doctor had certainly pointed out logical holes in his position. From a logical standpoint the whole world might be a fraud perpetrated on everybody. But logic meant nothing - logic itself was a fraud, starting with unproved assumptions and capable of proving anything. The world is what it is! - and carries its own evidence of trickery.

But does it? What did he have to go on? Could he lay down a line between known facts and everything else and then make a reasonable interpretation of the world, based on facts alone - an interpretation free from complexities of logic and no hidden assumptions of points not certain. Very well -

First fact, himself. He knew himself directly. He existed.

Second facts, the evidence of his "five senses," everything that he himself saw and heard and smelled and tasted with his physical senses. Subject to their limitations, he must believe his senses. Without them he was entirely solitary, shut up in a locker of bone, blind, deaf, cut off, the only being in the world.

And that was not the case. He knew that he did not invent the information brought to him by his senses. There had to be something else out there, some *otherness* that produced the things his senses recorded. All philosophies that claim that the physical world around him did not exist except in his imagination were sheer nonsense.

But beyond that, what? Were there any third facts on which he could rely? No, not at this point. He could not afford to believe anything that he was told, or that he read, or that was implicitly assumed to be true about the world around him. No, he could not believe any of it, for the sum total of what he had been told and read and been taught in school was so contradictory, so senseless, so wildly insane that none of it could be believed unless he personally confirmed it.

Wait a minute - The very telling of these lies, these senseless contradictions, was a fact in itself, known to him directly. To that extent they were data, probably very important data.

The world as it had been shown to him was a piece of unreason, an idiot's dream. Yet it was on too mammoth a scale to be without some reason. He came wearily back to his original

point: Since the world could not be as crazy as it appeared to be, it must necessarily have been arranged to appear crazy in order to deceive him as to the truth.

Why had they done this to him? And what was the truth behind the sham? There must be some clue in the deception itself. What thread ran through it all? Well, in the first place he had been given a superabundance of explanations of the world around him, philosophies, religions, "common-sense" explanations. Most of them were so clumsy, so obviously inadequate, or meaningless, that they could hardly have expected him to take them seriously. They must have intended them simply as misdirection.

But there were certain basic assumptions running through all the hundreds of explanations of the craziness around him. It must be these basic assumptions that he was expected to believe. For example, there was the deep-seated assumption that he was a "human being," essentially like millions of others around him and billions more in the past and the future.

That was nonsense! He had never once managed to get into real communication with all those things that looked so much like him but were so different. In the agony of his loneliness, he had deceived himself that Alice understood him and was a being like him. He knew now that he had suppressed and refused to examine thousands of little discrepancies because he could not bear the thought of returning to complete loneliness. He had needed to believe that his wife was a living, breathing being of his own kind who understood his inner thoughts. He had refused to consider the possibility that she was simply a mirror, an echo - or something unthinkably worse.

He had found a mate, and the world was tolerable, even though dull, stupid, and full of petty annoyance. He was moderately happy and had put away his suspicions. He had accepted, quite docilely, the treadmill he was expected to use, until a slight mischance had momentarily cut through the fraud - then his suspicions had returned with impounded force; the bitter knowledge of his childhood had been confirmed.

He supposed that he had been a fool to make a fuss about it. If he had kept his mouth shut they would not have locked him up. He should have been as subtle and as shrewd as they, kept his eyes and ears open and learned the details of and the reasons for the plot against him. He might have learned how to circumvent it.

But what if they had locked him up - the whole world was an asylum and all of them his keepers.

A key scraped in the lock, and he looked up to see an attendant entering with a tray. "Here's your dinner, sir."

"Thanks, Joe," he said gently. "Just put it down."

"Movies tonight, sir," the attendant went on. "Wouldn't you like to go? Dr. Hayward said you could -"

"No, thank you. I prefer not to."

"I wish you would, sir." He noticed with amusement the persuasive intentness of the attendant's manner. "I think the doctor wants you to. It's a good movie. There's a Mickey Mouse cartoon -"

"You almost persuade me, Joe," he answered with passive agreeableness. "Mickey's trouble is the same as mine, essentially. However, I'm not going. They need not bother to hold movies tonight."

"Oh, there will be movies in any case, sir. Lots of our other guests will attend."

"Really? Is that an example of thoroughness, or are you simply keeping up the pretence in talking to me? It isn't necessary, Joe, if it's any strain on you. I *know* the game. If I don't attend, there is no point in holding movies."

He liked the grin with which the attendant answered this thrust. Was it possible that this being was created just as he appeared to be - big muscles, phlegmatic disposition, tolerant, doglike? Or was there nothing going on behind those kind eyes, nothing but robot reflex? No, it was more likely that he was one of them, since he was so closely in attendance on him.

The attendant left and he busied himself at his supper tray, scooping up the already-cut bites of meat with a spoon, the only implement provided. He smiled again at their caution and thoroughness. No danger of that - he would not destroy this body as long as it served him, in investigating the truth of the matter. There were still many different avenues of research available before taking that possibly irrevocable step.

After supper he decided to put his thoughts in better order by writing them; he obtained paper. He should start with a general statement of some underlying postulate of the credos that had been drummed into him all his "life." Life? Yes, that was a good one. He wrote:

I am told that I was born a certain number of years ago and that I will die a similar number of years hence. Various clumsy stories have been offered me to explain to me where I was before birth and what becomes of me after death, but they are rough lies, not intended to deceive, except as misdirection. In every other possible way the world around me assures me that I am mortal, here but a few years, and a few years hence gone completely - nonexistent.

WRONG-I am immortal. I transcend this little time axis; a seventy-year span on it is but a casual phase in my experience. Second only to the prime datum of my own existence is the emotionally convincing certainty of my own continuity. I may be a closed curve, but, closed or open, I neither have a beginning nor an end. Self-awareness is not relational; it is absolute, and cannot be reached to be destroyed, or created. Memory, however, being a relational aspect of consciousness, may be tampered with and possibly destroyed.

It is true that most religions which have been offered me teach immortality, but note the fashion in which they teach it. The surest way to lie convincingly is to tell the truth unconvincingly. They did not wish me to believe.

Caution: Why have they tried so hard to convince me that I am going to "die" in a few years? There must be a very important reason. I infer that they are preparing me for some sort of a major change. It may be crucially important for me to figure out their intentions about this - probably I have several years in which to reach a decision. Note: Avoid using the types of reasoning they have taught me.

The attendant was back. "Your wife is here, sir."

"Tell her to go away."

"Please sir - Dr. Hayward is most anxious that you should see her."

"Tell Dr. Hayward that I said that he is an excellent chess player."

"Yes, sir." The attendant waited for a moment. "Then you won't see her, sir?"

"No, I won't see her."

He wandered around the room for some minutes after the attendant had left, too distraught to return to his recapitulation. By and large they had played very decently with him since they had brought him here. He was glad that they had allowed him to have a room alone, and he certainly had more time free for contemplation than had ever been possible on the outside. To be sure, continuous effort to keep him busy and to distract him was made, but, by being stubborn, he was able to circumvent the rules and gain some hours each day for introspection.

But, damnation! - he did wish they would not persist in using Alice in their attempts to divert his thoughts. Although the intense terror and revulsion which she had inspired in him when he had first rediscovered the truth had now aged into a simple feeling of repugnance and distaste for her company, nevertheless it was emotionally upsetting to be reminded of her, to be forced into making decisions about her.

After all, she *had* been his wife for many years. Wife? What was a wife? Another soul like one's own, a complement, the other necessary pole to the couple, a sanctuary of understanding and sympathy in the boundless depths of aloneness. *That* was what he had thought, what he had needed to believe and had believed fiercely for years. The yearning need for companionship of his own kind had caused him to see himself reflected in those beautiful eyes and had made him quite uncritical of occasional incongruities in her responses.

He sighed. He felt that he had sloughed off most of the typed emotional reactions which they had taught him by precept and example, but Alice had gotten under his skin, way under, and it still hurt. He had been happy - what if it had been a dope dream? They had given him an excellent, a beautiful mirror to play with - the more fool he to have looked behind it!

Wearily he turned back to his summing up.

The world is explained in either one of two ways; the common-sense way which says that the world is pretty much as it appears to be and that ordinary human conduct and motivations are reasonable, and the religio-mystic solution which states that the world is dream stuff, unreal, insubstantial, with reality somewhere beyond.

WRONG - both of them. The common-sense scheme has no sense to it of any sort. "Life is short and full of trouble. Man born of woman is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. His days are few and they are numbered. All is vanity and vexation." Those quotations may be jumbled and incorrect, but that is a fair statement of the common-sense world-is-as-it seems in its only possible evaluation. In such a world, human striving is about as rational as the blind dartings of a moth against a light bulb. The "common-sense world" is a blind insanity, out of nowhere, going nowhere, to no purpose.

As for the other solution, it appears more rational on the surface, in that it rejects the utterly irrational world of common-sense. But it is not a rational solution, it is simply a flight from reality of any sort, for it refuses to believe the results of the only available direct communication between the ego and the Outside. Certainly the "five senses" are poor enough channels of communication, but they are the only channels.

He crumpled up the paper and flung himself from the chair. Order and logic were no good - his answer was right because it smelled right. But he still did not know all the answer. Why the grand scale to the deception, countless creatures, whole continents, an enormously involved

and minutely detailed matrix of insane history, insane tradition, insane culture? Why bother with more than a cell and a strait jacket?

It must be, it had to be, because he was supremely important to deceive him completely, because a lesser deception would not do. Could it be that they dare not let him suspect his real identity no matter how difficult and involved the fraud?

He had to know. In some fashion he must get behind the deception and see what went on when he was not looking. He had had one glimpse; this time he must see the actual working, catch the puppet masters in their manipulations.

Obviously the first step must be to escape from this asylum, but to do it so craftily that they would never see him, never catch up with him, not have a chance to set the stage before him. That would be hard to do. He must excel them in shrewdness and subtlety.

Once decided, he spent the rest of the evening in considering the means by which he might accomplish his purpose. It seemed almost impossible - he must get away without once being seen and remain in strict hiding. They must lose track of him completely in order that they would not know where to centre their deceptions. That would mean going without food for several days. Very well - he could do it. He must not give them any warning by unusual action or manner.

The lights blinked twice. Docilely he got up and commenced preparations for bed. When the attendant looked through the peephole he was already in bed, with his face turned to the wall.

Gladness! Gladness everywhere! It was good to be with his own kind, to hear the music swelling out of every living thing, as it always had and always would - good to know that everything was living and aware of him, participating in him, as he participated in them. It was good to be, good to know the unity of many and the diversity of one. There had been one bad thought - the details escaped him - but it was gone - it had never *been*; there was no place for it.

The early-morning sounds from the adjacent ward penetrated the sleep-laden body which served him here and gradually recalled him to awareness of the hospital room. The transition was so gentle that he carried over full recollection of what he had been doing and why. He lay still, a gentle smile on his face, and savoured the uncouth, but not unpleasant, languor of the body he wore. Strange that he had ever forgotten despite their tricks and stratagems. Well, now that he had recalled the key, he would quickly set things right in this odd place. He would call them in at once and announce the new order. It would be amusing to see old Glaroon's expression when he realized that the cycle had ended -

The click of the peephole and the rasp of the door being unlocked guillotined his line of thought. The morning attendant pushed briskly in with the breakfast tray and placed it on the tip table. "Morning, sir. Nice, bright day - want it in bed, or will you get up?"

Don't answer! Don't listen! Suppress this distraction! This is part of their plan - But it was too late, too late. He felt himself slipping, falling, wrenched from reality back into the fraud world in which they had kept him. It was gone, gone completely, with no single association around him to which to anchor memory. There was nothing left but the sense of heartbreaking loss and the acute ache of unsatisfied catharsis.

"Leave it where it is. I'll take care of it."

"Okey-doke." The attendant bustled out, slamming the door, and noisily locked it.

He lay quite still for a long time, every nerve end in his body screaming for relief.

At last he got out of bed, still miserably unhappy, and attempted to concentrate on his plans for escape. But the psychic wrench he had received in being recalled so suddenly from his plane of reality had left him bruised and emotionally disturbed. His mind insisted on rechewing its doubts, rather than engage in constructive thought. Was it possible that the doctor was right, that he was not alone in his miserable dilemma? Was he really simply suffering from paranoia, delusions of self-importance?

Could it be that each unit in this yeasty swarm around him was the prison of another lonely ego - helpless, blind and speechless, condemned to an eternity of miserable loneliness? Was the look of suffering which he had brought to Alice's face a true reflection of inner torment and not simply a piece of play-acting intended to manoeuvre him into compliance with their plans?

A knock sounded at the door. He said "Come in," without looking up. Their comings and goings did not matter to him.

"Dearest -" A well-known voice spoke slowly and hesitantly.

"Alice!" He was on his feet at once, and facing her. "Who let you in here?"

"Please, dear, please - I had to see you."

"It isn't fair. It isn't fair." He spoke more to himself than to her. Then: "Why did you come?"

She stood up to him with a dignity he had hardly expected. The beauty of her childlike face had been marred by line and shadow, but it shone with unexpected courage. "I love you," she answered quietly. "You can tell me to go away, but you can't make me stop loving you and trying to help you."

He turned away from her in an agony of indecision. Could it be possible that he had misjudged her? Was there, behind that barrier of flesh and sound symbols, a spirit that truly yearned towards his? Lovers whispering in the dark - "You *do* understand. don't you?"

"Yes, dear heart, I understand."

"Then nothing that happens to us can matter, as long as we are together and understand -" Words, words, rebounding hollowly from an unbroken wall -

No, he *couldn't* be wrong! Test her again - "Why did you keep me on that job in Omaha?"

"But I didn't make you keep that job. I simply pointed out that we should think twice before -"

"Never mind. Never mind." Soft hands and a sweet face preventing him with mild stubbornness from ever doing the thing that his heart told him to do. Always with the best of intentions, the best of intentions, but always so that he had never quite managed to do the silly, unreasonable things that he knew were worth while. Hurry, hurry, hurry, and strive, with an angel-faced jockey to see that you don't stop long enough to think for yourself -

"Why did you try to stop me from going back upstairs that day?"

She managed to smile, although her eyes were already spilling over with tears. "I didn't know it really mattered to you. I didn't want us to miss the train."

It had been a small thing, an unimportant thing. For some reason not clear even to him he had insisted on going back upstairs to his study when they were about to leave the house for a short vacation. It was raining, and she had pointed out that there was barely enough time to get

to the station. He had surprised himself and her, too, by insisting on his own way in circumstances in which he had never been known to be stubborn.

He had actually pushed her to one side and forced his way up the stairs. Even then nothing might have come of it had he not - quite unnecessarily - raised the shade of the window that faced towards the rear of the house.

It was a very small matter. It had been raining, hard, out in front. From this window the weather was clear and sunny, with no sign of rain.

He had stood there quite a long while, gazing out at the impossible sunshine and rearranging his cosmos in his mind. He re-examined long-suppressed doubts in the light of this one small but totally unexplainable discrepancy. Then he had turned and had found that she was standing behind him.

He had been trying ever since to forget the expression that he had surprised on her face.

"What about the rain?"

"The rain?" she repeated in a small, puzzled voice.

"Why, it was raining, of course. What about it?"

"But it was *not* raining out my study window."

"What? But of course it was. I did notice the sun break through the clouds for a moment, but that was all."

"Nonsense!"

"But, darling, what has the weather to do with you and me? What difference does it make whether it rains or not - to us?" She approached him timidly and slid a small hand between his arm and side. "Am I responsible for the weather?"

"I think you are. Now please go."

She withdrew from him, brushed blindly at her eyes, gulped once, then said in a voice held steady: "All right. I'll go. But remember - you *can* come home if you want to. And I'll be there, if you want me." She waited a moment, then added hesitantly: "Would you... would you kiss me good-by?"

He made no answer of any sort, neither with voice nor eyes. She looked at him, then turned, fumbled blindly for the door, and rushed through it.

The creature he knew as Alice went to the place of assembly without stopping to change form. "It is necessary to adjourn this sequence. I am no longer able to influence his decisions."

They had expected it, nevertheless they stirred with dismay.

The Glaroom addressed the First for Manipulation. "Prepare to graft the selected memory track at once."

Then, turning to the First for Operations, the Glaroom said. "The extrapolation shows that he will tend to escape within two of his days. This sequence degenerated primarily through your failure to extend that rainfall all around him. Be advised."

"It would be simpler if we understood his motives."

"In my capacity as Dr. Hayward, I have often thought so," commented the Glaroon acidly, "but if we understood his motives, we would be part of *him*. Bear in mind the Treaty! He almost remembered."

The creature known as Alice spoke up. "Could he not have the Taj Mahal next sequence? For some reason he values it."

"You are becoming assimilated!"

"Perhaps. I am not in fear. Will he receive it?"

"It will be considered."

The Glaroon continued with order: "Leave structures standing until adjournment. New York City and Harvard University are now dismantled. Divert him from those sectors.

"Move!"

FRITZCHEN

by Charles Beaumont

The ghosts and goblins of the olden days must have derived at least part of their substance from the sure certainty of our ancestors that there were myriads of living beings in the world that had not been uncovered and named. Today we like to suppose that the mapping of our world's flora and fauna has been virtually completed. We know so very many animals! And - yet - do we really? There are strange footprints in the Himalayas. There are strange fragments washed ashore from uncharted depths. There are strange visions in our skies....

IT had once been a place for dreaming. For lying on your back in the warm sand and listening to the silence and making faraway things seem real. The finest place in all the world, for all the reasons that ever were.

But it had stopped being this long ago. Now, he supposed, it wasn't much more than a fairly isolated cove, really: a stretch of land bleeding into the river at one of its wide points, cut off like a tiny peninsula; a grey, dull place, damp and unnatural from its nights beneath the tidewaters - decaying, sinking slowly, glad to be eaten by the river. As Edna had put it: Just a lot of dirty wet sand. Not a place for dreaming anymore.

Mr. Peldo shifted his position and sighed as he remembered. He took from his mouth the eviscerated end of a lifeless cigar, flipped it away distastefully, watched as the mud whitened and oozed where it landed and the spiders lumbered clumsily away in fright.

The spiders made him think of his snakes. And soon he was thinking, too, of rabbits and goldfish and ooo wow-wow puppy dogs, all flop-eared and soft, common as a blade of grass-and his bread-and-butter. His living.

He was almost relieved to hear Edna's coarse voice beside him.

"Jake."

She would now make some complaint about the foolishness of this whole trip, adding that it made her sinuses runny.

"Yes, Chicken, what is it?"

"Go and see to Luther."

Go-and-see-to-Luther. Eight-year-old kid ought to be able to see to himself, by God.

"All right. Where'd he go?"

"Somewhere over in that direction, there by the trees. I'm worried he might think of going in the water or get lost."

Mr. Peldo grunted softly as he pulled his weight erect. Exertion. Oh well, that was all right. Soon he would have started with the frustration, thinking about the lousy pet shop and his lousy life. Better to hunt in the trees for spoiled brats.

It was hard going. Had to end in a few yards of course, but still, it *was*... exciting, in a small, tired, remembering way. He pushed aside a drenched fern, and another, needles of wet hitting him.

"Luther."

Mr. Peldo continued for a few feet, until he could distinctly hear the current. A wall of leaves rose at the curve, so he stopped there, let the last of the thrill fall loose from him, then listened.

"Luther. Hustle, boy."

Only the water. The vibrant, treacherous river water, hurrying to join the Sound and to go with it to the ocean.

"Hey, *Luu-therr*."

Mr. Peldo stabbed his hands into the foliage and parted it. From the window, by peering close, he could see his son's back.

"Boy, when your father calls you, *answer* him, hear!"

Luther looked around disinterestedly, frowned and turned his head. He was sitting in the mud, playing.

Mr. Peldo felt the anger course spastically through him. He pushed forward and stopped, glared.

"Well?"

Then he glimpsed what his son had been playing with. Only a glimpse, though.

"Fritzchen!" Luther pronounced defiantly, shielding something in his hands. "Fritzchen - like I wanted to call Sol's birdie."

Mr. Peldo felt his eyes smart and rubbed them. "What have you got there?"

"Fritzchen, Fritzchen," the boy wailed. There was another sound then. A sound like none Mr. Peldo had ever heard: high-pitched, whiny, discordant. The sound an animal makes when it is in pain.

Mr. Peldo reached down and slapped at his son's mouth, which had fastened like a python's about the calf of his left leg. Then, by holding his thumb and forefinger tightly on Luther's nose, he forced him to drop the thing he had been hiding.

It fell on to the slime and began to thrash.

Mr. Peldo gasped. He stared for a moment, like an idiot at a lamp-shade, his mouth quite open and his eyes bulged.

A thin voice from across the trees called: "*Jake, is there anything wrong? Answer me!*"

He pulled off his sport coat and threw it about the squirmy thing. "No, no, everything's okay. Kid's just acting up is all. Hold your horses!"

"Well, hurry! It's getting dark!"

Mr. Peldo blocked Luther's charge with his foot.

"Where did you get that?"

Luther did not answer. He glowered sullenly at the ground, mumbling. "He's mine. I found him. You can't have him."

"Where did it come from?" Mr. Peldo demanded.

Luther's lower lip resembled a bloated sausage. Finally he jerked his thumb in the direction of the river bank.

"You can talk!"

Luther whimpered, tried once again to get at the wriggling bundle on the sand, sat down and said, "I found him in the water. I snuck up on him and grabbed him when he wasn't looking. Now he's mine and you can't have -"

But Mr. Peldo, having recovered himself, had plucked off the coat and was staring.

A place for dreaming.

Roadsters that would go over two hundred miles per hour. Promontoried chateaux with ten bathrooms. Coveys of lithe young temptresses, vacant-minded, full-bodied, infinitely imaginative, infinitely accessible....

"JAAAAke! Are you trying to scare me to death? It's cold and my sinuses are beginning to run!"

Luther looked at his father, snorted loudly and started for the trees.

"He's Fritzchen and he's *mine!*" he called back as he ran. "All right - I'll get even! You'll see!"

Mr. Peldo watched the small creature, fascinated, as all its legs commenced to move together, dwarfed, undeveloped legs, burrowing into the viscous ground. Shuddering slightly, he replaced the coat, gathered it into the form of a sack and started through the shrubbery.

Edna's nose had turned red. He decided not to show Fritzchen to her, for a while.

"Got no empties," Sol said slowly, eyeing the bundle Mr. Peldo held at arms' length. Sol didn't care for animals. He was old; his mind had fallen into a ravine; it paced the ravine; turned and paced, like a contented baboon. He was old.

Mr. Peldo waited for Edna and Luther to go around to the living quarters in the back. "Put the capuchin in with Bess," he said, then. "Ought to have a stout one. Hop to it, Sol, I can't stand here holding this all day."

" 'nother stray?"

"You - might say."

Sol shrugged and transferred the raucous little monkey from his carved wood cage to the parrot dome.

Then he looked back. Peldo was holding the jacket-bundle down on a table with both hands. Whatever was inside was moving in violent spasms, not the way a dog moves or a rabbit. There were tiny sounds.

"Give me a hand," Mr. Peldo said, and Sol helped him put the bundle, jacket and all, into the cage. They locked it.

"This'll do for a while," Mr. Peldo said, "until I can build a proper one. Now mind, Sol, you keep your mouth strictly shut about this. Shut."

Sol didn't answer. His nose had snapped upward and he held a conched hand behind his ear.

"Listen, you," Sol said.

Mr. Peldo took his fingers off the sport coat, which had begun to show a purplish stain through.

"First time it ever happened in sixteen years," Sol said.

The silence roared. The silent pet shop roared and burst and pulsed with tension, quiet electric tension. The animals didn't move anywhere in the room. Mr. Peldo's eyes darted from cage to cage, seeing the second strangest thing he had ever seen: unmoving snakes, coiled or supine, but still, as though listening; monkeys hidden in far corners, haunched; rabbits - even their noses quiet and frozen -; white mice huddled at the bottom of mills that turned in cautious, diminishing arcs, frightened, staring creatures.

The phlegm in Mr. Peldo's throat racked loose.

Then it was quiet again. Though not exactly quiet.

Sol quit his survey of the animals and turned back to the occupant of the capuchin's cage. The sport jacket glistened with stain now and from within the dark folds there was a scrabbling and a small gurgling sound.

Then the jacket fell away.

"Tom-hell, Jake!" Sol said.

The animals had begun to scream, all of them, all at once.

"Not a word to anyone now, Sol! Promise."

Mr. Peldo feasted. He stared and stared, feeling satisfaction.

"What in glory is it?" Sol inquired above the din.

"A pet," Mr. Peldo answered, simply.

"Pet, hey?"

"We'll have to build a special cage for it," Mr. Peldo beamed. "Say, bet there ain't many like this one! No, sir. We'll have to read up on it so's we can get the feeding right and all ..."

"*You* read up." Sol's eyes were large. The air was filled with the wild beating of birds' wings.

Mr. Peldo was musing. "By the way, Sol, what you suppose it could be?"

The old man cocked his head to one side, peered from slitted eyes, picked out the crumpled sport jacket quickly and let it fall to the floor. It dropped heavily and exuded a sick water smell. Sol shrugged.

"Cross between a whale," he said, "and a horsefly, near's I can see."

"Maybe it's valuable - you think?" Mr. Peldo's ideas were growing.

"Couldn't say. Most likely not, in the face of it."

The chittering sound rose into a sort of staccato wail, piercing, clear over the frantic pets.

"Where in thunder you get it?"

"*He* didn't. I did." It was Luther, scowling, in his nightclothes.

"Go to bed. Go away."

"I found Fritzchen in the water. He likes me."

"Out!"

"Dirty stinking rotten lousy rotten stealer!"

Sol put his fingers into his ears and shut his eyes.

Luther made a pout and advanced towards Fritzchen's cage. The sobbing noises ceased.

"He hadda lock you up. Yeah. *I* was gonna let you loose again." The boy glared at his father. "See how he loves me." Luther put his face up to the cage, and as he did so the small animal came forward, ponderously, with suctionlike noises from its many legs.

Mr. Peldo looked disinterested. He inspected his watchstem. Neither he nor Sol saw what happened.

Luther stamped his foot and yelled. The right side of his face was covered with something that gathered and dripped down.

"Luther!" It was Mr. Peldo's wife. She ran into the room and looked at the cage. "Oh, that nasty thing!" She stormed out, clutching her son's pink ear.

"Damn woman will drive me crazy," Mr. Peldo said. Then he noticed that the shop was quiet again. Sol had thrown the damp jacket over Fritzchen's cage. There was only the sobbing.

"Funny!"

Mr. Peldo bent down, lifted the end of the coat and put his face close. He jerked back with abnormal speed, swabbing at his cheek.

There was a sound like a drowning kitten's purr.

Luther stood in the back doorway. Hate and astonishment contorted his features. "That's all he cares about me when I only wanted to be good to him! Now he loves *you*, dirty rotten -"

"Look, boy, your father's getting mighty tired of -"

"Yeah, well, he'll be sorry."

Fritzchen began to chitter again.

When Mr. Peldo returned to the shop after dinner, he found a curious thing. Bess, the parrot, lay on her side, dead.

Everything else was normal. The animals were wakeful or somnolent but normal. Fritzchen's cage was covered with a canvas and there was silence from within.

Mr. Peldo inspected Bess and was horrified to discover the bird's condition. She lay inundated in an odd miasmatic jelly which had hardened and was now spongy to the touch. It covered her completely. What was more, extended prodding revealed that something had happened to Bess's insides.

They were gone.

And without a trace. Even the bones. Bess was little more than skin and feathers.

Mr. Peldo recalled the substance that had struck his face when he examined Fritzchen's cage the last time. In a frenzy he pulled off the tarpaulin. But Fritzchen was there and the cage was as securely locked as ever.

And easily twenty feet from the parrot dome.

He went back and found the capuchin staring at him out of quizzical eyes.

Luther, of course. Monster boy. Spoiled bug of a child. He had an active imagination. Probably rigged the whole thing, like the time he emasculated the parakeet in an attempt to turn it inside out.

Mr. Peldo was ungratified that the animals had not yet gotten used to Fritzchen. They began their harangue, so he switched off the light and waited for his eyes to accustom themselves to the moonlight. Moonlight comes fast to small towns near rivers.

Fritzchen must be sleeping. Curled like a baby anaconda, legs slender filaments adhering to the cage floor, the tender tiny tail tucked around so that the tip rested just inside the immense mouth.

Mr. Peldo studied the animal. He watched the mouth especially, noting its outsized relationship to the rest of the body.

But - Mr. Peldo peered - could it actually be that Fritzchen was *larger*? Surely not. The stomach did seem fatter, yet the finely ground hamburger, the dish of milk, the oysters, sat to one side, untouched. Nor had the accommodating bathing and drinking pool been disturbed.

Then he noticed, for the first time, that the mouth had no teeth. There did not appear to be a gullet! And the spiny snout, with its florid green cup, was not a nose after all, for the nose was elsewhere.

But most curious of all, Fritzchen had grown. Oh, yes, grown. No doubt about it.

Mr. Peldo retired hours later with sparkling visions of wealth. He would contact - somebody appropriate - and sell his find for many hundreds of thousands of dollars. Then he would run away to Europe and play with a different woman every night until he died of his excesses.

He was awakened a short time later by Sol, who informed him that the bird of paradise and one dalmatian pup had died during the night. He knew because he'd heard the racket from clean across the street.

"Oh, not the ooo wow-wow," said Edna. "Not the liddle puppy!"

Luther sat up in bed, interested.

"How'd it happen?" Mr. Peldo said.

"Don't know. No good way for definite sure." Sol's eyelids almost closed. "Their innards is gone."

Edna put her head beneath the covers.

"Fritzchen?"

"Guess. Y'ough't'a do somethin' with that crittur. Bad actor."

"He got out - that it?"

"Hey-up. Or somebody let him out. Cage is all locked up tight as wax, 'n it wailin' like a banshee."

Mr. Peldo whirled to face his son, who stuck out his tongue.

"See here, young fellow, we're going to get to the bottom of this. If I find out that you -"

"Don't think t'was the lad," Sol said.

"Why not?"

"Wa'l... that there thing is thrice the size t'was yesterday when you brung 'er in."

"No."

"No nothin'. Stomach's pooched out like it's fit to bust."

Mr. Peldo got up and rubbed his hand over his bald head.

"But look, Sol, if it didn't get out, and - Luther, you didn't let it out, did you?"

"No, ma'am."

"- then how we going to blame it? Maybe there's a disease going around."

"I know, I know," Luther sang, swinging his feet in the air. "His nose can go longer."

"Be still, boy."

"Well, it *can!* I saw it. Fritzchen did it on the beach hit a bird 'way out over the water and he didn't move out of my hands."

"What happened to the bird, Luther?"

"Well, it got stuck up with this stuff Fritzchen has inside him, so it couldn't do anything. Then when it was all glued, Fritzchen pulled it back closer to him and shot out his nose and put his nose inside the bird's mou -"

Mr. Peldo felt his cheek, where the molasses had gathered that time. Both he and Luther had thought of it as an affectionate gesture, no worse than a St. Bernard leaping and pawing over you, raking your face, covering you with friendly, doggy slobber.

That's why Luther had gotten angry.

But Fritzchen wasn't being affectionate. It didn't work only because Fritzchen was too small, or they had been too big.

Mr. Peldo remembered Bess.

Edna poked her head out of the covers and said, "You listen to that! The neighbours will kill us!"

The sounds from the shop were growing stronger and louder and more chaotic.

Mr. Peldo dashed to the hall and returned with a telephone book. "Here," he said, tossing it to his wife, "get the numbers of all the zoos and museums."

"He's mine, he's mine!" Luther screeched.

Sol, who was old, said, "Jake, you never you mind about that. You just fished up something quaar, is all, and the best thing you can do is chuck 'er smack back where she come from."

"Edna - Get those numbers, do you hear me? All the museums in the state. I'll be back."

The wailing had reached a crescendo now.

And Luther had disappeared.

Mr. Peldo put on a robe and hurried across the frosty lawn to the back door of the shop.

"Luther!"

The small boy had a box of kitchen matches, holding a cluster of these in his hands, lighting them and hurling them into Fritzchen's cage. The fiery sticks landed; there was a cry of pain and then the matches spluttered out against moist skin.

"Luther!"

"I wanted to be good to you." Luther was saying. "but then you hadda take up with *him!* Yeah, well, now you'll see!"

Mr. Peldo threw his son out the door.

The painful wail became an intermittent cry: a strange cry, not unmelodious.

Mr. Peldo looked into the great jewelled milk-white eyes of the creature and dodged as the snout unrolled like a party favour, spraying a fine crystal glaze of puce jam.

Fritzchen stood erect. He - it - had changed. There were antennae where no antennae had been, many of the legs had developed claws; the mouth, which had been toothless the day before, was now tilled with sharp brown needles. Fritzchen had been fifteen inches high when Mr. Peldo first saw him. Now he stood over thirty inches.

Still time, though. Time for everything.

Mr. Peldo looked at the animal until his eyes hurt; then he saw the newspaper on the floor. It was soaked with what looked like shreds of liquid soap - jelly, greenish, foul with the odour of seaweed and other things. On it lay a bird and a small dog.

He felt sad for a moment. But then he thought again of some of the things he had dreamed a long time ago, of what he had now, and he determined to make certain telephone calls.

A million dollars, or almost, probably. They'd - oh, they'd stuff Fritzchen, at all odds, or something like that.

"Dirty rotten lousy -"

Luther had come back. He had a crumpled-up magazine saturated with oil and lighter fluid. The magazine was on fire.

The monkeys and the rabbits and the mice and the goldfish and the cats and birds and dogs shrilled in fear. But Fritzchen didn't.

Fritzchen howled only once. Or lowed: a deep sound from somewhere in the middle of his body that seemed to come from his body and not just his mouth. It was an eerily mournful sound that carried a new tone, a tone of helplessness. Then the creature was silent.

By the time Mr. Peldo reached the cage, Luther had thrown in the paper and was squirting inflammable fluid from a can. The fire burned fiercely.

"I *told* you," Luther said, pettishly. When the fire was pulled and scattered and trampled out, an ugly thing remained in the cage. An ugly blackened thing that made no noise.

Luther began to cry.

Then he stopped.

And Mr. Peldo stopped chasing him.

Sol and Edna in the doorway didn't move either. They all listened.

It could have been a crazed elephant shambling madly through a straw village...

Or a whale blind with the pain of sharp steel thrashing and leaping in illimitable waters...

Or it could have been a massive hawk swooping in outraged vengeance upon the killers of her young...

The killers of her young!

In that moment before the rustling sound grew huge; before the windows shattered and the great nightmarish shadow came into the shop, Mr. Peldo understood the meaning of Fritzchen's inconsolable cries.

They were the cries of a lost infant for its mother...

THE GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES

by Fritz Leiber, Jnr.

Early in this century Arthur Machen brought to readers the realization that a big modern city like London might serve to hide the monstrous survivals of a fearful past. Fritz Leiber, a resident of Chicago in this later day, advances an even more dreadful theory - that our present cities are evolving their own special supernatural beings, that these beings will not resemble those of old, but will be part and parcel of the very stone and gasoline of our mechanized metropoli.

ALL right, I'll tell you why the Girl gives me the creeps. Why I can't stand to go downtown and see the mob slavering up at her on the tower, with that pop bottle or pack of cigarettes or whatever it is beside her. Why I hate to look at magazines any more because I know she'll turn up somewhere in a brassiere or a bubble bath. Why I don't like to think of millions of Americans drinking in that poisonous half smile. It's quite a story - more story than you're expecting.

No, I haven't suddenly developed any long-haired indignation at the evils of advertising and the national glamour-girl complex. That'd be a laugh for a man in my racket, wouldn't it? Though I think you'll agree there's something a little perverted about trying to capitalize on sex that way. But it's okay with me. And I know we've had the Face and the Body and the Look and what not else, so why shouldn't someone come along who sums it all up so completely, that we have to call her the Girl and blazon her on all the billboards from Times Square to Telegraph Hill?

But the Girl isn't like any of the others. She's unnatural. She's morbid. She's unholy.

Oh these are modern times, you say, and the sort of thing I'm hinting at went out with witchcraft? But you see I'm not altogether sure myself what I'm hinting at, beyond a certain point. There are vampires and vampires, and not all of them suck blood.

And there were the murders, if they were murders.

Besides, let me ask you this. Why, when America is obsessed with the Girl, don't we find out more about her? Why doesn't she rate a Time cover with a droll biography inside? Why hasn't there been a feature in *Life* or the *Post*? A Profile in the *New Yorker*? Why hasn't *Charm* or *Mademoiselle* done her career saga? Not ready for it? Nuts!

Why haven't the movies snapped her up? Why hasn't she been on Information, Please? Why don't we see her kissing candidates at political rallies? Why isn't she chosen queen of some sort of junk or other at a convention?

Why don't we read about her tastes and hobbies, her views of the Russian situation? Why haven't the columnists interviewed her in a kimono on the top floor of the tallest hotel in Manhattan and told us who her boyfriends are?

Finally - and this is the real killer - why hasn't she ever been drawn or painted?

Oh, no she hasn't. If you knew anything about commercial art you'd know that. Every blessed one of those pictures was worked up from a photograph. Expertly? Of course. They've got the top artists on it. But that's how it's done.

And now I'll tell you the *why* of all that. It's because from the top to the bottom of the whole world of advertising, news, and business, there isn't a solitary soul who knows where the Girl came from, where she lives, what she does, who she is, even what her name is.

You heard me. What's more, not a single solitary soul ever *sees* her - except one poor damned photographer, who's making more money off her than he ever hoped to in his life and who's scared and miserable as Hell every minute of the day.

No. I haven't the faintest idea who he is or where he has his studio. But I know there has to be such a man and I'm morally certain he feels just like I *said*.

Yes, I might be able to find her, if I tried. I'm not sure though - by now she probably has other safeguards. Besides, I don't want to.

Oh, I'm off my rocker, am I? That sort of thing can't happen in the Era of the Atom? People can't keep out of sight that way, not even Garbo?

Well I happen to know they can, because last year I was that poor damned photographer I was telling you about. Yes. last year, when the Girl made her first poisonous splash right here in this big little city of ours.

Yes, I knew you weren't here last year and you don't know about it. Even the Girl had to start small. But if you hunted through the files of the local newspapers, you'd find some ads, and I might be able to locate you some of the old displays - I think Lovelybelt is still using one of them. I used to have a mountain of photos myself, until I burned them.

Yes, I made my cut off her. Nothing like what that other photographer must be making, but enough so it still bought this whisky. She was funny about money. I'll tell you about that.

But first picture me then. I had a fourth floor studio in that rathole the Hauser Building, catty-corner from Ardleigh Park.

I'd been working at the Marsh-Mason studios until I'd gotten my bellyful of it and decided to start in for myself. The Hauser Building was crummy - I'll never forget how the stairs creaked - but it was cheap and there was a skylight.

Business was lousy. I kept making the rounds of all the advertisers and agencies, and some of them didn't object to me too much personally, but my stuff never clicked. I was pretty near broke. I was behind on my rent. Hell, I didn't even have enough money to have a girl.

It was one of those dark gray afternoons. The building was awfully quiet - even with the shortage they can't half rent the Hauser. I'd just finished developing some pix I was doing on speculation for Lovelybelt Girdles and Buford's Pool and Playground - the last a faked-up beach scene. My model had left. A Miss Leon. She was a civics teacher at one of the high schools and modelled for me on the side, just lately on speculation too. After one look at the prints, I decided that Miss Leon probably wasn't just what Lovelybelt was looking for - or my photography either. I was about to call it a day.

And then the street door slammed four stories down and there were steps on the stairs and she came in.

She was wearing a cheap, shiny black dress. Black pumps. No stockings. And except that she had a gray cloth coat over one of them, those skinny arms of hers were bare. Her arms are pretty skinny, you know, or can you see things like that any more??

And then the thin neck, the slightly gaunt, almost prim face, the tumbling mass of dark hair, and looking out from under it the hungriest eyes in the world.

That's the real reason she's plastered all over the country today, you know - those eyes. Nothing vulgar, but just the same they're looking at you with a hunger that's all sex and something more than sex. That's what everybody's been looking for since the Year One - something a little more than sex.

Well, boys, there I was, alone with the Girl, in an office that was getting shadowy, in a nearly empty building. A situation that a million male Americans have undoubtedly pictured to themselves with various lush details. How was I feeling? Scared.

I know sex can be frightening. That cold heart-thumping when you're alone with a girl and feel you're going to touch her. But if it was sex this time, it was overlaid with something else.

At least I wasn't thinking about sex.

I remember that I took a backward step and that my hand jerked so that the photos I was looking at sailed to the floor.

There was the faintest dizzy feeling like something was being drawn out of me. Just a little bit.

That was all. Then she opened her mouth and everything was back to normal for a while.

"I see you're a photographer, mister," she said. "Could you use a model?"

Her voice wasn't very cultivated.

"I doubt it," I told her, picking up the pix. You see, I wasn't impressed. The commercial possibilities of her eyes hadn't registered on me yet, by a long shot. "What have you done?"

Well she gave me a vague sort of story and I began to check her knowledge of model agencies and studios and rates and what not and pretty soon I said to her,

"Look here, you never modelled for a photographer in your life. You just walked in here cold."

Well, she admitted that was more or less so.

All along through our talk I got the idea she was feeling her way, like someone in a strange place. Not that she was uncertain of herself, or of me, but just of the general situation.

"And you think anyone can model?" I asked her pityingly.

"Sure," she said.

"Look," I said, "a photographer can waste a dozen negatives trying to get one halfway human photo of an average woman. How many do you think he'd have to waste before he got a real catchy, glamorous pix of her?"

"I think I could do it," she said.

Well, I should have kicked her out right then. Maybe I admired the cool way she stuck to her dumb little guns. Maybe I was touched by her underfed look. More likely I was feeling mean on account of the way my pix had been snubbed by everybody and I wanted to take it out on her by showing her up.

"Okay, I'm going to put you on the spot," I told her. "I'm going to try a couple of shots of you. Understand, it's strictly on spec. If somebody should ever want to use a pPhoto of you, which is about one chance in two million, I'll Pay you regular rates for your time. Not otherwise."

She gave me a smile. The first. "That's swell by me," she said.

Well, I took three or four shots, closeups of her face since I didn't fancy her cheap dress, and at least she stood up to my sarcasm. Then I remembered I still had the Lovelybelt stuff and I guess the meanness was still working in me because I handed her a girdle and told her to go back of the screen and get into it and she did, without getting flustered as I'd expected, and since we'd gone that far, I figured we might as well shoot the beach scene to round it out, and that was that.

All this time I wasn't feeling anything particular in one way or the other except every once in a while I'd get one of those faint dizzy flashes and wonder if there was something wrong with my stomach or if I could have been a bit careless with my chemicals.

Still, you know, I think the uneasiness was in me all the while.

I tossed her a card and pencil. "Write your name and address and phone," I told her and made for the darkroom.

A little later she walked out. I didn't call any goodbyes. I was irked because she hadn't fussed around or seemed anxious about her poses, or even thanked me, except for that one smile.

I finished developing the negatives, made some prints, glanced at them, decided they weren't a great deal worse than Miss Leon. On an impulse I slipped them in with the pix I was going to take on the rounds next morning.

By now I'd worked long enough so I was a bit fagged and nervous, but I didn't dare waste enough money on liquor to help that. I wasn't very hungry. I think I went to a cheap movie.

I didn't think of the Girl at all, except maybe to wonder faintly why in my present womanless state I hadn't made a pass at her. She had seemed to belong to a, well, distinctly more approachable social strata than Miss Leon. But then of course there were all sorts of arguable reasons for my not doing that.

Next morning I made the rounds. My first stop was Munsch's Brewery. They were looking for a "Munsch Girl." Papa Munsch had a sort of affection for me, though he razed my photography. He had a good natural judgment about that, too. Fifty years ago he might have been one of the shoestring boys who made Hollywood.

Right now he was out in the plant pursuing his favourite occupation. He put down the beaded schooner, smacked his lips, gabbled something technical to someone about hops, wiped his fat hands on the big apron he was wearing, and grabbed my thin stack of pix.

He was about halfway through, making noises with his tongue and teeth, when he came to her. I kicked myself for even having stuck her in.

"That's her," he said. "The photography's not so hot, but that's the girl."

It was all decided. I wonder now why Papa Munsch sensed what the girl had right away, while I didn't. I think it was because I saw her first in the flesh, if that's the right word.

At the time I just felt faint.

"Who is she?" he said.

"One of my new models." I tried to make it casual.

"Bring her out tomorrow morning," he told me. "And your stuff. We'll photograph her here."

"Here, don't look so sick," he added. "Have some beer."

Well I went away telling myself it was just a fluke, so that she'd probably blow it tomorrow with her inexperience, and so on.

Just the same, when I reverently laid my next stack of pix on Mr. Fitch, of Lovelybelt's, rose-coloured blotter, I had hers on top.

Mr. Fitch went through the motions of being an art critic. He leaned over backward, squinted his eyes, waved his long fingers, and said, "Hmm. What do you think, Miss Willow? Here, in this light. Of course the photograph doesn't show the bias cut. And perhaps we should use the Lovelybelt Imp instead of the Angel. Still, the girl.... Come over here, Binns." More finger-waving. "I want a married man's reaction."

He couldn't hide the fact that he was hooked.

Exactly the same thing happened at Buford's Pool and Playground, except that Da Costa didn't need a married man's say-so.

"Hot stuff," he said, sucking his lips. "Oh boy, you photographers!"

I hot-footed it back to the office and grabbed up the card I'd given her to put down her name and address.

It was blank.

I don't mind telling you that the next five days were about the worst I ever went through, in an ordinary way. When next morning rolled around and I still hadn't got hold of her, I had to start stalling.

"She's sick," I told Papa Munsch over the phone.

"She at a hospital?" he asked me.

"Nothing that serious," I told him.

"Get her out here then. What's a little headache?"

"Sorry, I can't."

Papa Munsch got suspicious. "You really got this girl?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, I don't know. I'd think it was some New York model, except I recognized your lousy photography."

I laughed.

"Well look, you get her here tomorrow morning, you hear?"

"I'll try."

"Try.nothing. You get her out here."

He didn't know half of what I tried. I went around to all the model and employment agencies. I did some slick detective work at the photographic and art studios. I used up some of my last dimes putting advertisements in all three papers. I looked at highschool yearbooks and at employee photos in local house organs. I went to restaurants and drugstores, looking at waitresses, and to dime stores and department stores, looking at clerks. I watched the crowds coming out of movie theatres. I roamed the streets.

Evenings I spent quite a bit of time along Pick-up Row. Somehow that seemed the right place.

The fifth afternoon I knew I was licked. Papa Munsch's deadline - he'd given me several, but this was it - was due to run out at six o'clock. Mr. Fitch had already cancelled.

I was at the studio window, looking out at Ardleigh Park.

She walked in.

I'd gone over this moment so often in my mind that I had no trouble putting on my act. Even the faint dizzy feeling didn't throw me off.

"Hello," I said, hardly looking at her.

"Hello," she said.

"Not discouraged yet?"

"No." It didn't sound uneasy or defiant. It was just a statement.

I snapped a look at my watch, got up and said curtly, "Look here. I'm going to give you a chance. There's a client of mine looking for a girl your general type. If you do a real good job you might break into the modelling business.

"We can see him this afternoon if we hurry," I said. I picked up my stuff. "Come on. And next time if you expect favours, don't forget to leave your phone number."

"Uh, uh," she said, not moving.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I'm not going out to see any client of yours."

"The hell you aren't," I said. "You little nut, I'm giving you a break."

She shook her head slowly. "You're not fooling me, baby, you're not fooling me at all. They *want* me." And she gave me the second smile.

At the time I thought she must have seen my newspaper ad. Now I'm not so sure.

"And now I'll tell you how we're going to work," she went on. "You aren't going to have my name or address or phone number. Nobody is. And we're going to do all the pictures right here. Just you and me."

You can imagine the roar I raised at that. I was everything - angry, sarcastic, patiently explanatory, off my nut, threatening, pleading.

I would have slapped her face off, except it was photographic capital.

In the end all I could do was phone Papa Munsch and tell him her conditions. I knew I didn't have a chance, but I had to take it.

He gave me a really angry bawling out, said "no" several times and hung up.

It didn't faze her. "We'll start shooting at ten o'clock tomorrow," she said.

It was just like her, using that corny line from the movie magazines.

About midnight Papa Munsch called me up.

"I don't know what insane asylum you're renting this girl from," he said, "but I'll take her. Come around tomorrow morning and I'll try to get it through your head just how I want the pictures. And I'm glad I got you out of bed!"

After that it was a breeze. Even Mr. Fitch reconsidered and after taking two days to tell me it was quite impossible, he accepted the conditions too.

Of course you're all under the spell of the Girl, so you can't understand how much self-sacrifice it represented on Mr. Fitch's part when he agreed to forgo supervising the photography of my model in the Lovelybelt Imp or Vixen or whatever it was we finally used.

Next morning she turned up on time according to her schedule, and we went to work. I'll say one thing for her, she never got tired and she never kicked at the way I fussed over shots. I got along okay except I still had that feeling of something being shoved away gently. Maybe you've felt it just a little, looking at her picture.

When we finished I found out there were still more rules. It was about the middle of the afternoon. I started with her to get a sandwich and coffee.

"Uh uh," she said, "I'm going down alone. And look, baby, if you ever try to follow me, if you ever so much as stick your head out that window when I go, you can hire yourself another model."

You can imagine how all this crazy stuff strained my temper - and my imagination. I remember opening the window after she was gone - I waited a few minutes first - and standing there getting some fresh air and trying to figure out what could be back of it, whether she was hiding from the police, or was somebody's ruined daughter, or maybe had got the idea it was smart to be temperamental, or more likely Papa Munsch was right and she was partly nuts.

But I had my pix to finish up.

Looking back it's amazing to think how fast her magic began to take hold of the city after that. Remembering what came after, I'm frightened of what's happening to the whole country - and maybe the world. Yesterday I read something in *Time* about the Girl's picture turning up on billboards in Egypt.

The rest of my story will help show you why I'm frightened in that big general way. But I have a theory, too, that helps explain, though it's one of those things that's beyond that "certain point." It's about the Girl. I'll give it to you in a few words.

You know how modern advertising gets everybody's mind set in the same direction, wanting the same things, imagining the same things. And you know the psychologists aren't so sceptical of telepathy as they used to be.

Add up the two ideas. Suppose the identical desires of millions of people focused on one telepathic person. Say a girl. Shaped her in their image.

Imagine her knowing the hiddenmost hungers of millions of men. Imagine her seeing deeper into those hungers than the people that had them, seeing the hatred and the wish for death behind the lust. Imagine her shaping herself in that complete image, keeping herself as aloof as marble. Yet imagine the hunger she might feel in answer to their hunger.

But that's getting a long way from the facts of my story. And some of those facts are darn solid. Like money. We made money.

That was the funny thing I was going to tell you. I was afraid the Girl was going to hold me up. She really had me over a barrel, you know.

But she didn't ask for anything but the regular rates. Later on I insisted on pushing more money at her, a whole lot. But she always took it with that same contemptuous look, as if she were going to toss it down the first drain when she got outside.

Maybe she did.

At any rate, I had money. For the first time in months I had money enough to get drunk, buy new clothes, take taxicabs. I could make a play for any girl I wanted to. I only had to pick.

And so of course I had to go and pick -

But first let me tell you about Papa Munsch.

Papa Munsch wasn't the first of the boys to try to meet my model but I think he was the first to really go soft on her. I could watch the change in his eyes as he looked at her pictures. They began to get sentimental, reverent. Mama Munsch had been dead for two years.

He was smart about the way he planned it. He got me to drop some information which told him when she came to work, and then one morning he came pounding up the stairs a few minutes before.

"I've got to see her, Dave." he told me.

I argued with him, I kidded him, I explained he didn't know just how serious she was about her crazy ideas. I pointed out he was cutting both our throats. I even amazed myself by bawling him out.

He didn't take any of it in his usual way. He just kept repeating, "But, Dave. I've got to see her."

The street door slammed.

"That's her," I said, lowering my voice. "You've got to get out."

He wouldn't, so I shoved him in the darkroom. "And keep quiet," I whispered. "I'll tell her I can't work today."

I knew he'd try to look at her and probably come busting in, but there wasn't anything else I could do.

The footsteps came to the fourth floor. But she never showed at the door. I got uneasy.

"Get that bum out of there!" she yelled suddenly from beyond the door. Not very loud. but in her commonest voice.

"I'm going up to the next landing," she said, "And if that fatbellied bum doesn't march straight down to the street, he'll never get another pix of me except spitting in his lousy beer."

Papa Munsch came out of the darkroom. He was white. He didn't look at me as he went out. He never looked at her pictures in front of me again.

That was Papa Munsch. Now it's me I'm telling about. I talked around the subject with her, I hinted, eventually I made my pass.

She lifted my hand off her as if it were a damp rag.

"Nix, baby." she said. "This is working time."

"But afterwards..." I pressed.

"The rules still hold." And I got what I think was the fifth smile.

It's hard to believe, but she never budged an inch from that crazy line. I mustn't make a pass at her in the office, because our work was very important and she loved it and there mustn't be any distractions. And I couldn't see her anywhere else, because if I tried to, I'd never snap another picture of her - and all this with more money coming in all the time and me never so stupid as to think my photography had anything to do with it.

Of course I wouldn't have been human if I hadn't made more passes. But they always got the wet-rag treatment and there weren't any more smiles.

I changed. I went sort of crazy and light-headed - only sometimes I felt my head was going to burst. And I started to talk to her all the time. About myself.

It was like being in a constant delirium that never interfered with business. I didn't pay any attention to the dizzy feeling. It seemed natural.

I'd walk around and for a moment the reflector would look like a sheet of white-hot steel, or the shadows would seem like armies of moths, or the camera would be a big black coal car. But the next instant they'd come all right again.

I think sometimes I was scared to death of her. She'd seem the strangest, horriblest person in the world. But other times...

And I talked. It didn't matter what I was doing - lighting her, posing her, fussing with props, snapping my pix - or where she was - on the platform, behind the screen, relaxing with a magazine - I kept up a steady gab.

I told her everything I knew about myself. I told her about my first girl. I told her about my brother Bob's bicycle. I told her about running away on a freight, and the licking Pa gave me when I came home. I told her about shipping to South America and the blue sky at night. I told her about Betty. I told her about my mother dying of cancer. I told her about being beaten up in a fight in an alley back of a bar. I told her about Mildred. I told her about the first picture I ever sold. I told her how Chicago looked from a sailboat. I told her about the longest drunk I was ever on. I told her about Marsh-Mason. I told her about Gwen. I told her about how I met Papa Munsch. I told her about hunting her. I told her about how I felt now.

She never paid the slightest attention to what I said. I couldn't even tell if she heard me.

It was when we were getting our first nibble from national advertisers that I decided to follow her when she went home.

Wait, I can place it better than that. Something you'll remember from the out-of-town papers - those maybe murders I mentioned. I think there were six.

I say "maybe," because the police could never be sure they weren't heart attacks. But there's bound to be suspicion when heart attacks happen to people whose hearts have been okay, and

always at night when they're alone and away from home and there's a question of what they were doing.

The six deaths created one of those "mystery poisoner" scares. And afterwards there was a feeling that they hadn't really stopped, but were being continued in a less suspicious way.

That's one of the things that scares me now.

But at that time my only feeling was relief that I'd decided to follow her.

I made her work until dark one afternoon. I didn't need any excuses, we were snowed under with orders. I waited until the street door slammed, then I ran down. I was wearing rubber-soled shoes. I'd slipped on a dark coat she'd never seen me in, and a dark hat.

I stood in the doorway until I spotted her. She was walking by Ardleigh Park towards the heart of town. It was one of those warm fall nights. I followed her on the other side of the street. My idea for tonight was just to find out where she lived. That would give me a hold on her.

She stopped in front of a display window of Everly's department store, standing back from the glow. She stood there looking in.

I remembered we'd done a big photograph of her for Everly's, to make a flat model for a lingerie display. That was what she was looking at.

At the time it seemed all right to me that she should adore herself, if that was what she was doing.

When people passed she'd turn away a little or drift back farther into the shadows.

Then a man came by alone. I couldn't see his face very well, but he looked middle-aged. He stopped and stood looking in the window.

She came out of the shadows and stepped up beside him.

How would you boys feel if you were looking at a poster of the Girl and suddenly she was there beside you, her arm linked with yours?

This fellow's reaction showed plain as day. A crazy dream had come to life for him.

They talked for a moment. Then he waved a taxi to the curb. They got in and drove off.

I got drunk that night. It was almost as if she'd known I was following her and had picked that way to hurt me. Maybe she had. Maybe this was the finish.

But the next morning she turned up at the usual time and I was back in the delirium, only now with some new angles added.

That night when I followed her she picked a spot under a street lamp, opposite one of the Munsch Girl billboards.

Now it frightens me to think of her lurking that way.

After about twenty minutes a convertible slowed down going past her, backed up, swung in to the curb.

I was closer this time. I got a good look at the fellow's face. He was a little younger, about my age.

Next morning the same face looked up at me from the front page of the paper. The convertible had been found parked on a side street. He had been in it. As in the other maybe-murders, the cause of death was uncertain.

All kinds of thoughts were spinning in my head that day, but there were only two things I knew for sure. That I'd got the first real offer from a national advertiser, and that I was going to take the Girl's arm and walk down the stairs with her when we quit work.

She didn't seem surprised. "You know what you're doing?" she said.

"I know."

She smiled. "I was wondering when you'd get around to it."

I began to feel good. I was kissing everything good-bye, but I had my arm around hers.

It was another of those warm fall evenings. We cut across into Ardleigh Park. It was dark there, but all around the sky was a sallow pink from the advertising signs.

We walked for a long time in the park. She didn't say anything and she didn't look at me, but I could see her lips twitching and after a while her hand tightened on my arm.

We stopped. We'd been walking across the grass. She dropped down and pulled me after her. She put her hands on my shoulders. I was looking down at her face. It was the faintest sallow pink from the glow in the sky. The hungry eyes were dark smudges.

I was fumbling with her blouse. She took my hand away, not like she had in the studio. "I don't want that," she said.

First I'll tell you what I did afterwards. Then I'll tell you why I did it. Then I'll tell you what she said.

What I did was run away. I don't remember all of that because I was dizzy, and the pink sky was swinging against the dark trees. But after a while I staggered into the lights of the street. The next day I closed up the studio. The telephone was ringing when I locked the door and there were unopened letters on the floor. I never saw the Girl again in the flesh, if that's the right word.

I did it because I didn't want to die. I didn't want the life drawn out of me. There are vampires and vampires, and the ones that suck blood aren't the worst. If it hadn't been for the warning of those dizzy flashes, and Papa Munsch and the face in the morning paper, I'd have gone the way the others did. But I realized what I was up against while there was still time to tear myself away. I realized that wherever she came from, whatever shaped her, she's the quintessence of the horror behind the bright billboard. She's the smile that tricks you into throwing away your money and your life. She's the eyes that lead you on and on, and then show you death. She's the creature you give everything for and never really get. She's the being that takes everything you've got and gives nothing in return. When you yearn towards her face on the billboards, remember that. She's the lure. She's the bait. She's the Girl.

And this is what she said, "I want you. I want your high spots. I want everything that's made you happy and everything that's hurt you bad. I want your first girl. I want that shiny bicycle. I want that licking. I want that pinhole camera. I want Betty's legs. I want the blue sky filled with stars. I want your mother's death. I want your blood on the cobblestones. I want Mildred's mouth. I want the first picture you sold. I want the lights of Chicago. I want the gin. I want Gwen's hands. I want your wanting me. I want your life. Feed me, baby, feed me."

THE FISHING SEASON

by Robert Sheckley

Robert Sheckley, who is one of the new lights of the imaginative story-telling ranks, has made his mark as one who possesses a unique capacity for unearthly perception. In a recent survey of fantasy editors, not less than three selected him as their choice for anthology inclusion. In this story, apparently the story of just plain people in just an ordinary hometown place, his peculiar talent for the unexpected is clearly manifested.

THEY had been living in the housing project only a week, and this was their first invitation. They arrived on the dot of eight-thirty. The Carmichaels were obviously prepared for them, for the porch light was on, the front door partially open, and the living room a blaze of light.

"Do I look all right?" Phyllis asked at the door. "Seams straight, hair curly?"

"You're a vision in a red hat," her husband assured her. "Just don't spoil the effect by leading aces." She made a small face at him and rang the doorbell. Soft chimes sounded inside.

Mallen straightened his tie while they waited. He pulled out his breast handkerchief a microscopic fraction further.

"They must be making gin in the sub-cellar," he told his wife. "Shall I ring again?"

"No - wait a moment!" They waited, and he rang again. Again the chimes sounded.

"That's very strange," Phyllis said a few minutes later. "It was for tonight, wasn't it?" Her husband nodded. The Carmichaels had left their windows open to the warm spring weather. Through the Venetian blinds they could see a table set for bridge, chairs drawn up, candy dishes out, everything in readiness. But no one answered the door.

"Could they have stepped out?" Phyllis Mallen asked. Her husband walked quickly across the lawn to the driveway.

"Their car's in." He came back and pushed the front door farther open.

"Jimmy - don't go in."

"I'm not." He put his head in the door. "Hello! anybody home?"

Silence in the house.

"Hello!" he shouted, and listened intently. He could hear Friday-night noises next-door - people talking, laughing. A car passed in the street. He listened. A board creaked, somewhere in the house, then silence again.

"They wouldn't go away and leave their house open like this," he told Phyllis. "Something might have happened." He stepped inside. She followed, but stood uncertainly in the living room while he went into the kitchen. She heard him open the cellar door, call out, "Anyone home?" And close it again. He came back to the living room, frowned, and went upstairs.

In a little while Mallen came down with a puzzled expression on his face. "There's no one there," he said.

"Let's get out of here," Phyllis said, suddenly nervous in the bright, empty house. They debated leaving a note, decided against it, and started down the walk.

"Shouldn't we close the front door?" Jim Mallen asked, stopping.

"What good will it do? All the windows are open."

"Still -" He went back and closed it. They walked home slowly, looking back over their shoulders at the house. Mallen half-expected the Carmichaels to come running after them, shouting, "Surprise!"

But the bright house remained silent.

Their home was only a block away, a brick bungalow just like two hundred others in the development. Inside, Mr. Carter was making artificial trout flies on the card table. Working slowly and surely, his deft fingers guided the coloured threads with loving care. He was so intent on his work that he didn't hear the Mallens enter.

"We're home, dad," Phyllis said.

"Ah," Mr. Carter murmured. "Look at this beauty." He held up a finished fly. It was an almost exact replica of a hornet. The hook was cleverly concealed by overhanging yellow and black threads.

"The Carmichaels were out - we think," Mallen said, hanging up his jacket.

"I'm going to try Old Creek in the morning," Mr. Carter said. "Something tells me the elusive trout may be there." Mallen grinned to himself. It was difficult talking with Phyllis' father. Nowadays he never discussed anything except fishing. The old man had retired from a highly successful business on his seventieth birthday to devote himself wholeheartedly to his favourite sport.

Now, nearing eighty, Mr. Carter looked wonderful. It was amazing, Mallen thought. His skin was rosy, his eyes clear and untroubled, his pure white hair neatly combed back. He was in full possession of his senses, too - as long as you talked about fishing.

"Let's have a snack," Phyllis said. Regretfully she took off the red hat, smoothed out the veil and put it down on a coffee table. Mr. Carter added another thread to his trout fly, examined it closely, then put it down and followed them into the kitchen.

While Phyllis made coffee, Mallen told the old man what had happened. Mr. Carter's answer was typical.

"Try some fishing tomorrow and get it off your mind. Fishing, Jim, is more than a sport. Fishing is a way of life, and a philosophy as well. I like to find a quiet pool, and sit on the banks of it. I figure, if there's fish anywhere, they might as well be there."

Phyllis smiled, watching Jim twist uncomfortably on his chair. There was no stopping her father, once he got started. And anything would start him.

"Consider," Mr. Carter went on, "A young executive. Someone like yourself, Jim - dashing through a hall. Common enough? But at the end of the last long corridor is a trout stream. Consider a politician. You certainly see enough of them in Albany. Brief case in hand, worried -?"

"That's strange," Pliyllis said, stopping her father in mid-flight. She was holding an unopened bottle of milk in her hand.

"Look." Their milk came from *Stannerton Dairies*. The green label on this bottle read: *Stanneron Daries*.

"And look." She pointed. Under that, it read: *lisensed by the new yoRk Bord of healthh*. It looked like a clumsy imitation of the legitimate label.

"Where did you get this?" Mallen asked.

"Why, I suppose from Mr. Elger's store. Could it be an advertising stunt?"

"I despise the man who would fish with a worm," Mr. Carter intoned gravely. "A fly - a fly is a work of art. But the man who'd use a worm would rob orphans and burn churches."

"Don't drink it," Mallen said. "Let's look over the rest of the food."

There were three more counterfeited items. A candy bar which purported to be a Mello-Bite had an orange label instead of the familiar crimson. There was a jar of *American ChEEse*, almost a third larger than the usual jars of that brand, and a bottle of *SPArkling Watr*.

"That's very odd," Mallen said, rubbing his jaw.

"I always throw the little one back," Mr. Carter said. "It's not sporting to keep them, and that's part of a fisherman's code. Let them grow, let them ripen, let them gain experience. It's the old, crafty ones I want, the ones who skulk under logs, who dart away at the first sight of the angler. Those are the lads who put up a fight!"

"I'm going to take this stuff back to Elger," Mallen said, putting the items into a paper bag. "If you see anything else like it, save it."

"Old Creek is the place," Mr. Carter said. "That's where they hide out."

Saturday morning was bright and beautiful. Mr. Carter ate an early breakfast and left for Old Creek, stepping lightly as a boy, his battered fly-decked hat set at a jaunty angle. Jim Mallen finished coffee and went over to the Carmichael house.

The car was still in the garage. The windows were still open, the bridge table set, and every light was on, exactly as it had been the night before. It reminded Mallen of a story he had read once about a ship under full sail, with everything in order - but not a soul on board.

"I wonder if there's anyone we can call?" Phyllis asked when he returned home. "I'm sure there's something wrong."

"Sure. But who?" They were strangers in the project. They had a nodding acquaintance with three or four families, but no idea who might know the Carmichaels.

The problem was settled by the ringing of the telephone.

"If it's anyone from around here," Jim said as Phyllis answered it, "Ask them."

"Hello?"

"Hello. I don't believe you know me. I'm Marian Carpenter, from down the block. I was just wondering - has my husband dropped over there?" The metallic telephone voice managed to convey worry, fear.

"Why, no. No one's been in this morning."

"I see." The thin voice hesitated.

"Is there anything I can do?" Phyllis asked.

"I don't understand it," Mrs. Carpenter said. "George - my husband - had breakfast with me this morning. Then he went upstairs for his jacket. That was the last I saw of him."

"I'm sure he didn't come back downstairs. I went up to see what was holding him - we were going for a drive - and he wasn't there. I searched the whole house. I thought he might be playing a practical joke, although George never joked in his life - so I looked under beds and in the closets. Then I looked in the cellar, and I asked next door, but no one's seen him. I thought he might have visited you - he was speaking about it -"

Phyllis explained to her about the Carmichaels' disappearance. They talked for a few seconds longer, then hung up.

"Jim," Phyllis said, "I don't like it. You'd better tell the police about the Carmichaels."

"We'll look pretty foolish when they turn up visiting friends in Albany."

"We'll have to chance it."

Jim found the number and dialled, but the line was busy.

"I'll go down."

"And take this stuff with you." She handed him the paper bag.

Police-Captain Lesner was a patient, ruddy-faced man who had been listening to an unending stream of complaints all night and most of the morning. His patrolmen were tired, his sergeants were tired, and he was the tiredest of all. Nevertheless, he ushered Mr. Mallen into his office and listened to his story.

"I want you to write down everything you've told me," Lesner said when he was through. "We got a call on the Carmichaels from a neighbour late last night. Been trying to locate them. Counting Mrs. Carpenter's husband that makes ten in two days."

"Then what?"

"Disappearances."

"My Lord," Mallen breathed softly. He shifted the paper bag. "All from this town?"

"Every one," Captain Lesner said harshly, "from the Vainsville housing project in this town. As a matter of fact, from four square blocks in that project." He named the streets.

"I live in there," Mallen said.

"So do I."

"Have you any idea who the - the kidnapper could be?" Mallen asked.

"We don't think it's a kidnapper," Lesner said, lighting his twentieth cigarette for the day. "No ransom notes. No selection. A good many of the missing persons wouldn't be worth a nickel to a kidnapper. And wholesale like that - not a chance!"

"A maniac then?"

"Sure. But how has he grabbed whole families? Or grown men, big as you? And where has he hidden them, or their bodies?" Lesner ground out the cigarette viciously. "I've got men searching every inch of this town. Every cop within twenty miles of here is looking. The state police are stopping cars. And we haven't found a thing."

"Oh, and here's something else." Mallen showed him the counterfeited items.

"Again, I don't know," Captain Lesner confessed sourly. "I haven't had much time for this stuff. We've had other complaints -" The telephone rang, but Lesner ignored it.

"It looks like a black market scheme. I've sent some stuff like it to Albany for analysis. I'm trying to trace outlets. Might be foreign. As a matter of fact, the F.B.I. might - damn that 'phone!"

He yanked it out of its cradle.

"Lesner speaking. Yes... yes. You're sure? Of course, Mary. I'll be right over." He hung up. His red face was suddenly drained of colour.

"That was my wife's sister," he announced. "My wife's missing!"

Mallen drove home at breakneck speed. He slammed on the brakes, almost cracking his head against the windshield, and ran into the house.

"Phyllis!" he shouted. Where was she? Oh God, he thought. If she's gone -

"Anything wrong?" Phyllis asked, coming out of the kitchen.

"I thought -" He grabbed her and hugged until she squealed.

"Really," she said, smiling. "We're not newlyweds. Why. we've been married a whole year and a half -"

He told her what he'd found out in the police station.

Phyllis looked around the living room. It had seemed so warm and cheerful a week ago. Now, a shadow under the couch frightened her, an open closet door was something to shudder at. She knew it would never be the same.

There was a knock at the door.

"Don't go," Phyllis said.

"Who's there?" Mallen asked.

"Joe Dutton, from down the block. I suppose you've heard the news?"

"Yes," Mallen said, standing beside the closed door.

"We're barricading the streets," Dutton said. "Going to look over anyone going in or out. We're going to put a stop to this, even if the police can't. Want to join us?"

"You bet," Mallen said, and opened the door. The short, swarthy man on the other side was wearing an old army jacket. He was gripping a two foot chunk of wood.

"We're going to cover these blocks like a blanket." Dutton said. "If anyone else is grabbed it'll have to be underground." Mallen kissed his wife and joined him.

That afternoon there was a mass meeting in the school auditorium. Everyone from the affected blocks was there, and as many of the townspeople as could crowd in. The first thing

they found out was that, in spite of the blockades, three more people were missing from the Vainsville project.

Captain Lesner spoke, and told them that he had called Albany for help. Special officers were on their way down, and the F.B.I. was coming in on it, too. He stated frankly that he didn't know what or who was doing it, or why. He couldn't even figure out why all the missing were from one part of the Vainsville project.

He had gotten word from Albany about the counterfeited food that seemed to be scattered all over the project. The examining chemists could detect no trace of any toxic agent. That seemed to explode a recent theory that the food had been used to drug people, making them walk out of their homes to whatever was taking them. However, he cautioned everyone not to eat it. You could never tell.

The companies whose labels had been impersonated had disclaimed any knowledge. They were prepared to bring suit against anyone infringing on their copyrights.

The mayor spoke, in a series of well-intentioned platitudes, counselling them to be of good heart; the civic authorities were taking the whole situation in hand.

Of course, the mayor didn't live in the Vainsville project.

The meeting broke up, and the men returned to the barricades. They started looking for firewood for the evening, but it was unnecessary. Help arrived from Albany, a cavalcade of men and equipment. The four square blocks were surrounded by armed guards. Portable searchlights were set up, and the area declared under an eight o'clock curfew.

Mr. Carter missed all the excitement. He had been fishing all day. At sunset he returned, empty-handed but happy. The guards let him through, and he walked into the house.

"A beautiful fishing day," he declared.

The Mallens spent a terrible night, fully clothed, dozing in snatches, looking at the searchlights playing against their windows and hearing the tramp of armed guards.

Eight o'clock Sunday morning - two more people missing. Gone from four blocks more closely guarded than a concentration camp.

At ten o'clock Mr. Carter, brushing aside the objections of the Mallens, shouldered his fishing kit and left. He hadn't missed a day since April thirtieth, and wasn't planning on missing one all season.

Sunday noon - another person gone, bringing the total up to sixteen.

Sunday, one o'clock - all the missing children were found!

A police car found them on a road near the outskirts of town, eight of them, including the Carmichael boy, walking dazedly toward their homes. They were rushed to a hospital.

There was no trace of the missing adults, though.

Word of mouth spread the news faster than the newspapers or radio could. The children were completely unharmed. Under examination by psychiatrists it was found that they didn't remember where they had been or how they had been taken there. All the psychiatrists could piece together was a sensation of flying, accompanied by a sickness to the stomach. The children were kept in the hospital for safety, under guard.

But between noon and evening, another child disappeared from Vainsville.

Just before sunset, Mr. Carter came home. In his knapsack were two big rainbow trout. He greeted the Mallens gaily and went to the garage to clean his fish.

Jim Mallen stepped into the backyard and started to the garage after him, frowning. He wanted to ask the old man about something he had said a day or two ago. He couldn't quite remember what it was, but it seemed important.

His next door neighbour, whose name he couldn't remember, greeted him.

"Mallen," he said. "I think I know."

"What?" Mallen asked.

"Have you examined the theories?" the neighbor asked.

"Of course." His neighbour was a skinny fellow in shirtsleeves and vest. His bald head glistened red in the sunset.

"Then listen. It can't be a kidnapper. No sense in their methods. Right?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And a maniac is out. How could he snatch fifteen, sixteen people? And return the children? Even a gang of maniacs couldn't do that, not with the number of cops we've got watching. Right?"

"Go on." Out of the corner of his eye Mallen saw his neighbour's fat wife come down the back steps. She walked over to them and listened.

"The same goes for a gang of criminals, or even Martians. Impossible to do it, and no reason even if they could. We've got to look for something *illogical* - and that leaves just one logical answer."

Mallen waited, and glanced at the woman. She was looking at him, arms folded across her aproned chest. In fact, she was glaring at him. Can she be angry at me, Mallen thought. What have I done?

"The only answer," his neighbour said slowly, "is that there is a hole somewhere around here. A hole in the space-time continuum."

"What!" blurted Mallen. "I don't quite follow that."

"A hole in time," the bald neighbour explained, "or a hole in space. Or in both. Don't ask me how it got there; it's there. What happens is, a person steps into that hole, and bingo! He's somewhere else. Or in some other time. Or both. This hole can't be seen, of course - it's fourth dimensional - but it's there. The way I see it, if you traced the movements of those people, you'd find every one of them passed through a certain spot - and vanished."

"Hmmm." Mallen thought it over. "That sounds interesting - but we know that lots of people vanished right out of their own homes."

"Yeah," the neighbour agreed. "Let me think - I know! The hole in space-time isn't fixed. It drifts, moves around. First it's in Carpenter's house, then it moves on, aimlessly -"

"Why doesn't it move out of these four blocks?" Mallen asked, wondering why the man's wife was still glaring at him, her lips tightly compressed.

"Well," the neighbour said, "it has to have some limitations."

"And why were the children returned?"

"Oh for heaven's sake, Mallen, you can't ask me to figure out every little thing, can you? It's a good working theory. We'll have to have more facts before we can work out the whole thing."

"Hello there!" Mr. Carter called, emerging from the garage. He held up two beautiful trout, neatly cleaned and washed.

"The trout is a gamey fighter, and makes magnificent eating as well. The most excellent of sports, and the most excellent of foods!" He walked unhurriedly into the house.

"I've got a better theory," the neighbour's wife said, unfolding her arms and placing her hands on her ample hips.

Both men turned to look at her.

"Who is the only person around here who isn't the least bit worried about what's going on? Who goes walking all over with a bag he *says* has *fish* in it? Who *says* he spends all his time fishing?"

"Oh, no," Mallen said. "Not Dad Carter. He has a whole philosophy about fishing -"

"I don't care about philosophy!" the woman shrieked. "He fools you, but he doesn't fool me! I only know he's the only man in this neighbourhood who isn't the least bit worried and he's around and gone every day and lynching would probably be too good for him!" With that she spun and went waddling into her house.

"Look, Mallen." the bald neighbour said. "I'm sorry. You know how women are. She's upset, even if Danny is safe in the hospital."

"Sure," Mallen said.

"She doesn't understand the space-time continuum," he went on earnestly. "But I'll explain it to her tonight. She'll apologize in the morning. You'll see."

The men shook hands and returned to their respective homes.

Darkness came swiftly, and searchlights went on all over town. Beams of light knifed down streets, into backyards, reflected from closed windows. The inhabitants of Vainsville settled down to wait for more disappearances.

Jim Mallen wished he could put his hands on whatever was doing it. Just for a second - that was all he'd need. But to have to sit and wait. He felt so helpless. His wife's lips were pale and cracked, and her eyes were tired. But Mr. Carter was cheerful, as usual. He fried the trout over a gas burner, serving both of them.

"I found a beautiful quiet pool today," Mr. Carter announced. "It is near the mouth of Old Creek, up a little tributary. I fished there all day, leaning back against the grassy bank and watching the clouds. Fantastic things, clouds! I shall go there tomorrow, and fish in it one more day. Then I will move on. A wise fisherman does not fish out a stream. Moderation is the code of the fisherman. Take a little, leave a little. I have often thought -"

"Oh Dad, please!" Phyllis screamed, and burst into tears. Mr. Carter shook his head sadly, smiled an understanding smile and finished his trout. Then he went into the living room to work on a new fly.

Exhausted, the Mallens went to bed....

Mallen awoke and sat upright. He looked over and saw his wife, asleep beside him. The luminous dial of his watch read four fifty-eight. Almost morning, he thought.

He got out of bed, slipped on a bathrobe and padded softly downstairs. The searchlights were flashing against the living-room window, and he could see a guard outside.

That was a reassuring sight, he thought, and went into the kitchen. Moving quietly, he poured a glass of milk. There was fresh cake on top of the refrigerator, and he cut himself a slice.

Kidnappers, he thought. Maniacs. Men from Mars. Holes in space. Or any combination thereof. No, that was wrong. He wished he could remember what he wanted to ask Mr. Carter. It was important.

He rinsed out the glass, put the cake back on the refrigerator and walked to the living room. Suddenly he was thrown violently to one side.

Something had hold of him! He flailed out, but there was nothing to hit. Something was gripping him like an iron hand, dragging him off his feet. He threw himself to one side, scrambling for a footing. His feet left the floor and he hung for a moment, kicking and squirming. The grip around his ribs was so tight he couldn't breathe, couldn't make a sound. Inexorably, he was being lifted.

Hole in space, he thought, and tried to scream. His wildly flailed arms caught a corner of the couch and he seized it. The couch was lifted with him. He yanked, and the grip relaxed for a moment, letting him drop to the floor.

He scrambled across the floor towards the door. The grip caught him again, but he was near a radiator. He wrapped both arms around it, trying to resist the pull. He yanked again, and managed to get one leg around, then the other.

The radiator creaked horribly as the pull increased. Mallen felt as though his waist would part, but he held on, every muscle stretched to the breaking point. Suddenly the grip relaxed completely.

He collapsed to the floor.

When he came to it was broad daylight. Phyllis was splashing water in his face, her lower lip caught between her teeth. He blinked, and wondered for a moment where he was.

"Am I still here?" he asked.

"Are you all right?" Phyllis demanded. "What happened? Oh, darling! Let's get out of this place -"

"Where's your father?" Mallen asked groggily, getting to his feet.

"Fishing. Now please, sit down. I'm going to call a doctor."

"No. Wait." Mallen went into the kitchen. On the refrigerator was the cake box. It read: *Johnson's Cake Shop. Vainville, New York.* A capital K on New York. Really a very small error.

And Mr. Carter? Was the answer there? Mallen raced upstairs and dressed. He crumpled the cake box and thrust it into his pocket, and hurried out the door.

"Don't touch anything until I get back!" he shouted at Phyllis. She watched him get into the car and race down the street. Trying hard to keep from crying, she walked into the kitchen.

Mallen was at Old Creek in fifteen minutes. He parked the car and started walking up the stream.

"Mr. Carter!" he shouted as he went. "Mr. Carter!"

He walked and shouted for half an hour, into deeper and deeper woods. The trees overhung the stream now, and he had to wade to make any speed at all. He increased his pace, splashing, slipping on stones, trying to run.

"Mr. Carter!"

"Hello!" He heard the old man's voice. He followed the sound, up a branch of the stream. There was Mr. Carter, sitting on the steep bank of a little pool, holding his long bamboo pole. Mallen scrambled up beside him.

"Take it easy, son," Mr. Carter said. "Glad you took my advice about fishing."

"No," Mallen panted. "I want you to tell me something."

"Gladly," the old man said. "What would you like to know?"

"A fisherman wouldn't fish out a pool completely, would he?"

"I wouldn't. But some might."

"And bait. Any good fisherman would use artificial bait?"

"I pride myself on my flies," Mr. Carter said. "I try to approximate the real thing. Here, for example, is a beautiful replica of a hornet." He plucked a yellow hook from his hat. "And here is a lovely mosquito."

Suddenly his line stirred. Easily, surely, the old man brought it in. He caught the gasping trout in his hand and showed him to Mallen.

"A little fellow - I won't keep him." He removed the hook gently, easing it out of the gasping gill, and placed the fish back in water.

"When you throw him back - do you think he knows? Does he tell the others?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Carter said. "The experience doesn't teach him anything. I've had the same young fish bite my line two or three times. They have to grow up a bit before they know."

"I thought so." Mallen looked at the old man. Mr. Carter was unaware of the world around him, untouched by the terror that had struck Vainsville.

Fishermen live in a world of their own, thought Mallen.

"But you should have been here an hour ago." Mr. Carter said. "I hooked a beauty. A magnificent fellow, two pounds if he was an ounce. What a battle for an old warhorse like me! And he got away. But there'll come another - hey, where are you going?"

"Back!" Mallen shouted, splashing into the stream. He knew now what he had been looking for in Mr. Carter. A parallel. And now it was clear.

Harmless Mr. Carter, pulling up his trout, just like that other, greater fisherman, pulling up his -

"Back to warn the other fish!" Mallen shouted over his shoulder, stumbling along the stream bed. If only Phyllis hadn't touched any food! He pulled the cake box out of his pocket and threw it from him as hard as he could. The hateful lure!

While the fishermen, each in his respective sphere, smiled and dropped their lines into the water again.

THE CROWD

by Ray Bradbury

When his remarkable career was in its earliest period, Ray Bradbury produced some of his most unusual ideas about people and the world we live in. His skill has smoothed and grown since then, but we do not believe that his ideas of that first flowering phase have been surpassed. Take this story, from his first published collection. We challenge you to produce another that so touches the heart of a rather hideous experience that must be common to all at one time or another.

MR. SPALLNER put his hands over his face.

There was the feeling of movement in space, the beautifully tortured scream, the impact and tumbling of the car with wall, through wall, over and down like a toy, and him hurled out of it. Then - silence.

The crowd came running. Faintly, where he lay, he heard them running. He could tell their ages and their sizes by the sound of their numerous feet over the summer grass and on the lined sidewalk, and over the asphalt street, and picking through the cluttered bricks to where his car hung half into the night sky, still spinning its wheels with a senseless centrifuge.

Where the crowd came from he didn't know. He struggled to remain aware and then the crowd faces hemmed in upon him, hung over him like the large glowing leaves of down-bent trees. They were a ring of shifting, compressing, changing faces over him, looking down, looking down, reading the time of his life or death by his face, making his face into a moon-dial, where the moon cast a shadow from his nose out upon his cheek to tell the time of breathing or not breathing any more ever.

How swiftly a crowd comes, he thought, like the iris of an eye compressing in out of nowhere.

A siren. A police voice. Movement. Blood trickled from his lips and he was being moved into an ambulance. Someone said, "Is he dead?" And someone else said, "No, he's not dead." And a third person said, "He won't die, he's not going to die." And he saw the faces of the crowd beyond him in the night, and he knew by their expressions that he wouldn't die. And that was strange. He saw a man's face, thin, bright, pale; the man swallowed and bit his lips, very sick. There was a small woman, too, with red hair and too much red on her cheeks and lips. And a little boy with a freckled face. Others' faces. An old man with a wrinkled upper lip, an old woman, with a mole upon her chin. They had all come from - where? Houses, cars, alleys,

from the immediate and the accident-shocked world. Out of alleys and out of hotels and out of street-cars and seemingly out of nothing they came.

The crowd looked at him and he looked back at them and did not like them at all. There was a vast wrongness to them. He couldn't put his finger on it. They were far worse than this machine-made thing that happened to him now.

The ambulance doors slammed. Through the windows he saw the crowd looking in, looking in. That crowd that always came so fast, so strangely fast, to form a circle, to peer down, to probe, to gawk, to question, to point, to disturb, to spoil the privacy of a man's agony by their frank curiosity.

The ambulance drove off. He sank back and their faces still stared into his face, even with his eyes shut.

The car wheels spun in his mind for days. One wheel, four wheels, spinning, spinning, and whirring, around and around.

He knew it was wrong. Something wrong with the wheels and the whole accident and the running of feet and the curiosity. The crowd faces mixed and spun into the wild rotation of the wheels.

He awoke.

Sunlight, a hospital room, a hand taking his pulse.

"How do you feel?" asked the doctor.

The wheels faded away. Mr. Spallner looked around.

"Fine -I guess."

He tried to find words. About the accident. "Doctor?"

"Yes?"

"That crowd - was it last night?"

"Two days ago. You've been here since Thursday. You're all right, though. You're doing fine. Don't try and get up."

"That crowd. Something about wheels, too. Do accidents make people, well, a - little off."

"Temporarily, some times. It wears off."

He lay staring up at the doctor. "Does it hurt your time sense?"

"Panic sometimes does."

"Makes a minute seem like an hour, or maybe an hour seem like a minute?"

"Yes."

"Let me tell you then." He felt the bed under him, the sunlight on his face. "You'll think I'm crazy. I was driving too fast. I know. I'm sorry now. I jumped the curb and hit that wall. I was hurt and numb, I know, but I still remember things. Mostly - the crowd." He waited a moment and then decided to go on, for he suddenly knew what it was that bothered him. "The crowd got there too quickly. Thirty seconds after the smash they were all standing over me and staring at me... it's not right they should run that fast, so late at night..."

"You only think it was thirty seconds," said the doctor. "It was probably three or four minutes. Your senses..."

"Yeah, I know - my senses, the accident. But I was conscious! I remember one thing that puts it all together and makes it funny, God, so damned funny. The wheels of my car, upside down. The wheels were still spinning, when the crowd got there!"

The doctor smiled.

The man in bed went on. "I'm positive! The wheels were spinning and spinning fast - the front wheels! Wheels don't spin very long, friction cuts them down. And these were really spinning!"

"You're confused," said the doctor.

"I'm not confused. That street was empty. Not a soul in sight. And then the accident and the wheels still spinning and all those faces over me, quick, in no time. And the way they looked down at me, I *knew* I wouldn't die..."

"Simple shock," said the doctor, walking away into the sunlight.

They released him from the hospital two weeks later. He rode home in a taxi. People had come to visit him during his two weeks on his back, and to all of them he had told his story, the accident, the spinning wheels, the crowd. They had all laughed with him concerning it and passed it off.

He leaned forward and tapped on the taxi window. "What's wrong?"

The cabbie looked back. "Sorry, boss. This is one helluva town to drive in. Got an accident up ahead. Want me to detour?"

"Yes. No, no! Wait. Go ahead. Let's - let's take a look."

The cab moved forward, honking.

"Funny damn thing," said the cabbie. "Hey, *you!* Get that fleatrap out the way!" Quieter. "Funny thing - more damn people. Nosy people."

Mr. Spallner looked down and watched his fingers tremble on his knee. "You noticed that, too?"

"Sure," said the cabbie. "All the time. There's always a crowd. You'd think it was their own mother got killed."

"They come running awfully fast," said the man in the back of the cab.

"Same way with a fire or an explosion. Nobody around. Boom. Lotsa people around. I dunno."

"Ever seen an accident - at night?"

The cabbie nodded. "Sure. Don't make no difference. There's always a crowd."

The wreck came in view. A body lay on the sidewalk. You knew there was a body even if you couldn't see it. Because of the crowd. The crowd with its back towards him as he sat in the rear of the cab. With its back towards him. He opened the window and almost started to yell. But he didn't have the nerve. If he yelled they might turn around.

And he was afraid to see their *faces*.

"I seem to have a penchant for accidents," he said, in his office. It was late afternoon. His friend sat across the desk from him, listening. "I got out of the hospital this morning and first thing on the way home, we detoured around a wreck."

"Things run in cycles," said Morgan.

"Let me tell you about my accident."

"I've heard it. Heard it all."

"But it was funny, you must admit."

"I must admit. Now how about a drink."

They talked on for half an hour or more. All the while they talked, at the back of Spallner's brain a small watch ticked, a watch that never needed winding. It was the memory of a few little things. Wheels and faces.

At about five-thirty there was a hard metal noise in the street. Morgan nodded and looked out and down. "What'd I tell you? Cycles. A truck and a cream-coloured Cadillac. Yes, yes."

Spallner walked to the window. He was very cold and as he stood there, he looked at his watch, at the small minute hand. One two three four five seconds - people running - eight nine ten eleven twelve - from all over, people came running - fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen seconds - more people, more cars, more horns blowing. Curiously distant, Spallner looked upon the scene as an explosion in reverse, the fragments of the detonation sucked back to the point of impulsion. Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one seconds and the crowd was there. Spallner made a gesture down at them, wordless.

The crowd had gathered so *fast*.

He saw a woman's body a moment before the crowd swallowed it up.

Morgan said, "You look lousy. Here. Finish your drink."

"I'm all right, I'm all right. Let me alone. I'm all right. Can you see those people? Can you see any of them? I wish we could see them closer."

Morgan cried out, "Where in hell are *you* going?"

Spallner was out the door, Morgan after him, and down the stairs, as rapidly as possible. "Come along, and hurry."

"Take it easy, you're not a well man!"

They walked out on to the street. Spallner pushed his way forward. He thought he saw a red-haired woman with too much red colour on her cheeks and lips.

"There!" He turned wildly to Morgan. "Did you see her?"

"See *who*?"

"Darnn it; she's gone. The crowd closed in!"

The crowd was all around, breathing and looking and shuffling and mixing and mumbling and getting in the way when he tried to shove through. Evidently the red-haired woman had seen him coming and run off.

He saw another familiar face! A little freckled boy. But there are many freckled boys in the world! And, anyway, it was no use, before Spallner reached him, this little boy ran away and vanished among the people.

"Is she dead?" a voice asked. "Is she dead?"

"She's dying," someone else replied. "She'll be dead before the ambulance arrives. They shouldn't have moved her. They shouldn't have moved her."

All the crowd faces - familiar, yet unfamiliar, bending over, looking down, looking down.

"Hey, mister, stop pushing."

"Who you shovin', buddy?"

Spallner came back out, and Morgan caught hold of him before he fell. "You damned fool. You're still sick. Why in hell'd you have to come down here?" Morgan demanded.

"I don't know, I really don't. They moved her, Morgan, someone moved her. You should never move a traffic victim. It kills them. It kills them."

"Yeah. That's the way with people. The dumb saps."

Spallner arranged the newspaper Clippings carefully.

Morgan looked at them. "What's the idea? Ever since your wreck you think every traffic scramble is part of you. What are these?"

"Clippings of motor car crackups, and photos. Look at them. Not at the cars," said Spallner, "but at the crowds around the cars." He pointed. "Here. Compare this photo of a wreck in the Wilshire District with one in Westwood. No resemblance. But now take this Westwood picture and align it with one taken in the Westwood District ten years ago." Again he mentioned. "This woman is in both pictures."

"Coincidence. The woman happened to be there once in 1936, again in 1946."

"A coincidence once, maybe. But twelve times over a period of ten years, when the accidents occurred as much as three miles from one another, no. Here." He dealt out a dozen photographs. "She's in all of these!"

"Maybe she's perverted."

"She's more than that. How does she *happen* to be there so quickly after each accident? And why does she wear the same clothes in pictures taken over a period of a decade?"

"I'll be damned, so she *is*."

"And, last of all, why was she standing over *me* the night of my accident, two weeks ago?"

They had a drink. Morgan went over the files. "What'd you do, hire a clipping service while you were in the hospital to go back through the newspapers for you?" Spallner nodded. Morgan sipped his drink. It was getting late. The street lights were coming on in the streets below the office. "What does all this add up to?"

"I don't know," said Spallner, "except that there's a universal law about accidents. *Crowds gather*. They *always* gather. And people, like you and I, have wondered from year after year, why they gathered so quickly, and *how*. I know the answer. Here it is!"

He flung the clippings down. "It frightens me."

"These people - mightn't they be thrill-hunters, perverted sensationalists with a carnal lust for blood and morbidity?"

Spallner shrugged. "Does that explain their being at *all* the accidents? Notice, they stick to certain territories. A Brentwood accident will bring out one group. A Huntington Park another. But there's a norm for faces, a certain percentage appear at each wreck."

Morgan said. "They're not *all* the same faces, are they?"

"Naturally not. Accidents draw normal people, too, in the course of time. But these, I find, are always the *first* ones there."

"Who are they? What do they want? You keep hinting and never telling. Good Lord, you must have some idea. You've scared yourself and now you've got me jumping."

"I've tried getting *to* them, but someone always trips me up, I'm always too late. They slip into the crowd and vanish. The crowd seems to offer protection to some of its members. They see me coming."

"Sounds like some sort of clique."

"They have one thing in common, they always show up together. At a fire or an explosion or on the sidelines of a war, at any public demonstration of this thing called death. Vultures, hyenas or saints, I don't know which they are, I just don't know. But I'm going to the police with it, this evening, It's gone on long enough. One of them shifted that woman's body today. They shouldn't have touched her. It killed her."

He placed the clippings in a brief-case. Morgan got up and slipped into his coat. Spallner clicked the brief-case shut. "Or, I just happened to think of it..."

"What?"

"Maybe they *wanted* her dead."

"Why?"

"Who knows? Come along?"

"Sorry. It's late. See you tomorrow. Luck." They went out together. "Give my regards to the cops. Think they'll believe you?"

"Oh, they'll believe me all right. Good night."

Spallner took it slow driving down-town.

"I want to get there," he told himself, "alive."

He was rather shocked, but not surprised, somehow, when the truck came rolling out of an alley straight at him. He was just congratulating himself on his keen sense of observation and talking out what he would say to the police department in his mind when the truck smashed into his car. It wasn't really his car, that was the disheartening thing about it. In a preoccupied mood he was tossed first this way and then that way, while he thought, What a shame. Morgan has gone and lent me his extra car for a few days until my other car is fixed, and now here I go again. The windshield hammered back into his face. He was forced back and forth in several lightning jerks. Then all motion stopped and all noise stopped and only pain filled him up.

He heard their feet running and running and running. He fumbled with the car door. It clicked. He fell out upon the pavement drunkenly and lay, ear to the asphalt, listening to them coming. It was like a great rainstorm, with many drops, heavy and light and medium, touching the earth. He waited a few seconds and listened to their coming and their arrival. Then, weakly, expectantly, he rolled his head up and looked.

The crowd was there.

He could smell their breaths, the mingled odours of many people sucking and sucking on the air a man needs to live by. They crowded and jostled and sucked and sucked all the air up from around his gasping face until he tried to tell them to move back, they were making him live in a vacuum. His head was bleeding very badly. He tried to move and realized something was

wrong with his spine. He hadn't felt much at the impact, but his spine *was* hurt. He didn't dare move.

He couldn't speak. Opening his mouth, nothing came out but a gagging.

Someone said, "Give me a hand. We'll roll him over and lift him into a more comfortable position."

Spallner's brain burst apart.

"No! Don't move me!"

"We'll move him," said the voice, casually.

"You idiots, you'll kill me, don't!"

But he could not say any of this out loud. He could only think it.

Hands took hold of him. They started to lift him. He cried out and nausea choked him up. They straightened him out into a ramrod of agony. Two men did it. One of them was thin, bright, pale, alert, a young man. The other man was very old and had a wrinkled upper lip.

He had seen their faces before.

A familiar voice said, "Is - is he dead?"

Another voice, a memorable voice, responded, "No. Not yet. But he will be dead before the ambulance arrives."

It was all a very silly, mad plot. Like every accident. He squealed hysterically at the solid wall of faces. They were all around him, these judges and jurors with the faces he had seen before. Through his pain he counted their faces.

The freckled boy. The old man with the wrinkled upper lip.

The red-haired, red-cheeked woman. An old woman with a mole on her chin.

"I know what you're here for," he thought. "You're here just as you're at all accidents. To make certain the right ones live and the right ones die. That's why you lifted me. You knew it would kill. You knew I'd live if you left me alone.

"And that's the way it's been since time began, when crowds gather. You murder much easier, this way. Your alibi is very simple, you didn't know it was dangerous to move a hurt man. You didn't mean to hurt him."

He looked at them, above him, and he was curious as a man under deep water looking up at people on a bridge. "Who are you? Where do you come from and how do you get here so soon? You're the crowd that's always in the way, using up good air that a dying man's lungs are in need of, using up space he should be using to lie in, alone. Tramping on people to make sure they die, that's you. I know *all* of you."

It was like a polite monologue. They said nothing. Faces. The old man. The red-haired woman.

Someone picked up his brief-case. "Whose is this?" they asked.

"It's mine! It's evidence against all of you!"

Eyes, inverted over him. Shiny eyes under tousled hair or under hats.

Faces.

Somewhere - a siren. The ambulance was coming. But, looking at the faces, the construction, the cast, the form of the faces, Spallner knew it was too late. He read it in their faces. They *knew*.

He tried to speak. A little bit got out:

"It - looks like I'll - be joining up with you. I - guess I'll be a member of your - group - now."

He closed his eyes then, and waited for the coroner.

HE

by H. P. Lovecraft

Do we really live in a world that is the logical extension of the ages that have preceded us? Is this clanking, roaring, fume-ridden age truly the normal offspring of the ordered slow progression of the centuries? Or is there something - abnormal - growing here? H. P. Lovecraft thought so. Although he lived in our times, he preferred to think of himself as one whose heart lay in the past. This story tells why.

I saw him on a sleepless night when I was walking desperately to save my soul and my vision. My coming to New York had been a mistake; for whereas I had looked for poignant wonder and inspiration in the teeming labyrinths of ancient streets that twist endlessly from forgotten courts and squares and waterfronts to courts and squares and waterfronts equally forgotten, and in the Cyclopean modern towers and pinnacles that rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons, I had found instead only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to master, paralyse, and annihilate me. The disillusion had been gradual. Coming for the first time upon the town, I had seen it in the sunset from a bridge, majestic above its waters, its incredible peaks and pyramids rising flowerlike and delicate from pools of violet mist to play with the flaming golden clouds and the first stars of evening. Then it had lighted up window by window above the shimmering tides where lanterns nodded and glided and deep horns bayed weird harmonies, and had itself become a starry firmament of dream, redolent of faery music, and one with the marvels of Carcassonne and Samarcand and El Dorado and all glorious and half-fabulous cities. Shortly afterward I was taken through those antique ways so dear to my fancy - narrow, curving alleys and passages where rows of red Georgian brick blinked with small-paned dormers above pillared doorways that had looked on gilded sedans and panelled coaches - and in the first flush of realization of these long-wished things I thought I had indeed achieved such treasures as would make me in time a poet.

But success and happiness were not to be. Garish daylight showed only squalor and alienage and the noxious elephantiasis of climbing, spreading stone where the moon had hinted of loveliness and elder magic; and the throngs of people that seethed through the flumelike streets were squat, swarthy strangers with hardened faces and narrow eyes, shrewd strangers without dreams and without kinship to the scenes about them, who could never mean aught to a blue-eyed man of the old folk, with the love of fair green lanes and white New England village steeples in his heart.

So instead of the poems I had hoped for, there came only a shuddering blankness and ineffable loneliness; and I saw at last a fearful truth which no one had ever dared to breathe

before - the unwhisperable secret of secrets - the fact that this city of stone and stridor is not a sentient perpetuation of Old New York as London is of Old London and Paris, of Old Paris, but that it is in fact quite dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things which have nothing to do with it as it was in life. Upon making this discovery I ceased to sleep comfortably, though something of resigned tranquillity came back as I gradually formed the habit of keeping off the streets by day and venturing abroad only at night, when darkness calls forth what little of the past still hovers wraithlike about, and old white doorways remember the stalwart forms that once passed through them. With this mode of relief I even wrote a few poems, and still refrained from going home to my people lest I seem to crawl back ignobly in defeat.

Then, on a sleepless night's walk, I met the man. It was in a grotesque hidden courtyard of the Greenwich section, for there in my ignorance I had settled, having heard of the place as the natural home of poets and artists. The archaic lanes and houses and unexpected bits of square and court had indeed delighted me, and when I found the poets and artists to be loud-voiced pretenders whose quaintness is tinsel and whose lives are a denial of all that pure beauty which is poetry and art, I stayed on for love of these venerable things. I fancied them as they were in their prime, when Greenwich was a placid village not yet engulfed by the town; and in the hours before dawn, when all the revellers had slunk away, I used to wander alone among their cryptical windings and brood upon the curious arcana which generations must have deposited there. This kept my soul alive, and gave me a few of those dreams and visions for which the poet far within me cried out.

The man came upon me at about two one cloudy August morning, as I was threading a series of detached courtyards; now accessible only through the unlighted hallways of intervening buildings, but once forming parts of a continuous network of picturesque alleys. I had heard of them by vague rumour, and realized that they could not be upon any map of today; but the fact that they were forgotten only endeared them to me, so that I had sought them with twice my usual eagerness. Now that I had found them, my eagerness was again redoubled; for something in their arrangement dimly hinted that they might be only a few of many such, with dark, dumb counterparts wedged obscurely betwixt high blank walls and deserted rear tenements, or lurking lamplessly behind archways, unbetrayed by hordes of the foreign-speaking or guarded by furtive and uncommunicative artists whose practices do not invite publicity or the light of day.

He spoke to me without invitation, noting my mood and glances as I studied certain knocked doorways above iron-railed steps, the pallid glow of traceried transoms feebly lighting my face. His own face was in shadow, and he wore a wide-brimmed hat which somehow blended perfectly with the out-of-date cloak he affected, but I was subtly disquieted even before he addressed me. His form was very slight, thin almost to cadaverousness, and his voice proved phenomenally soft and hollow, though not particularly deep. He had, he said, noticed me several times at my wanderings; and inferred that I resembled him in loving the vestiges of former years. Would I not like the guidance of one long practised in these explorations, and possessed of local information profoundly deeper than any which an obvious newcomer could possibly have gained?

As he spoke, I caught a glimpse of his face in the yellow beam from a solitary attic window. It was a noble, even a handsome, elderly countenance; and bore the marks of a lineage and refinement unusual for the age and place. Yet some quality about it disturbed me almost as much as its features pleased me - perhaps it was too white, or too expressionless, or too much out of keeping with the locality, to make me feel easy or comfortable. Nevertheless I followed him; for in those dreary days my quest for antique beauty and mystery was all that I had to keep

my soul alive, and I reckoned it a rare favour of Fate to fall in with one whose kindred seekings seemed to have penetrated so much farther than mine.

Something in the night constrained the cloaked man to silence, and for a long hour he led me forward without needless words, making only the briefest of comments concerning ancient names and dates and changes, and directing my progress very largely by gestures as we squeezed through interstices, tiptoed through corridors, clambered over brick walls, and once crawled on hands and knees through a low, arched passage of stone whose immense length and tortuous twistings effaced at last every hint of geographical location I had managed to preserve. The things we saw were very old and marvellous, or at least they seemed so in the few straggling rays of light by which I viewed them, and I shall never forget the tottering Ionic columns and fluted pilasters and urn-headed iron fence-posts and flaring lintelled windows and decorative fanlights that appeared to grow quainter and stranger the deeper we advanced into this inexhaustible maze of unknown antiquity.

We met no person, and as time passed the lighted windows became fewer and fewer. The street-lights we first encountered had been of oil, and of the ancient lozenge pattern. Later I noticed some with candles; and at last, after traversing a horrible unlighted court where my guide had to lead me with his gloved hand through total blackness to a narrow wooden gate in a high wall, we came upon a fragment of alley lit only by lanterns in front of every seventh house - unbelievably. Colonial tin lanterns with conical tops and holes punched in the sides. This alley led steeply uphill - more steeply than I had thought possible in this part of New York - and the upper end was blocked squarely by the ivy-clad wall of a private estate, beyond which I could see a pale cupola, and the tops of trees waving against a vague lightness in the sky. In this wall was a small, low-arched gate of nail-studded black oak, which the man proceeded to unlock with a ponderous key. Leading me within, he steered a course in utter blackness over what seemed to be a gravel path, and finally up a flight of stone steps to the door of the house, which he unlocked and opened for me.

We entered, and as we did so I, grew faint from a reek of infinite mustiness which welled out to meet us, and which must have been the fruit of unwholesome centuries of decay. My host appeared not to notice this, and in courtesy I kept silent as he piloted me up a curving stairway, across a hall, and into a room whose door I heard him lock behind us. Then I saw him pull the curtains of the three small-paned windows that barely showed themselves against the lightening sky; after which he crossed to the mantel, struck flint and steel, lighted two candles of a candelabrum of twelve sconces, and made a gesture enjoining soft-toned speech.

In this feeble radiance I saw that we were in a spacious, well-furnished and panelled library dating from the first quarter of the Eighteenth Century, with splendid doorway pediments, a delightful Doric cornice, and a magnificently carved overmantel with scroll-and-urn top. Above the crowded bookshelves at intervals along the walls were well-wrought family portraits, all tarnished to an enigmatical dimness, and bearing an unmistakable likeness to the man who now motioned me to a chair beside the graceful Chippendale table. Before seating himself across the table from me, my host paused for a moment as if in embarrassment; then, tardily removing his gloves, wide-brimmed hat, and cloak, stood theatrically revealed in full mid-Georgian costume from queued hair and neck ruffles to knee-breeches, silk hose, and the buckled shoes I had not previously noticed. Now slowly sinking into a lyre-back chair, he commenced to eye me intently.

Without his hat he took on an aspect of extreme age which was scarcely visible before, and I wondered if this unperceived mark of singular longevity were not one of the sources of my original disquiet. When he spoke at length, his soft, hollow, and carefully muffled voice not

infrequently quavered; and now and then I had great difficulty in following him as I listened with a thrill of amazement and half-disavowed alarm which grew each instant.

"You behold, Sir," my host began, "a man of very eccentrical habits, for whose costume no apology need be offered to one with your wit and inclinations. Reflecting upon better times, I have not scrupled to ascertain their ways and adopt their dress and manners; an indulgence which offends none if practised without ostentation. It hath been my good fortune to retain the rural seat of my ancestors, swallowed though it was by two towns, first Greenwich, which built up hither after 1800, then New York, which joined on near 1830. There were many reasons for the close keeping of this place in my family, and I have not been remiss in discharging such obligations. The squire who succeeded to it in 1768 studied sartain arts and made sartain discoveries, all connected with influences residing in this particular plot of ground and eminently deserving of the strongest guarding. Some curious effects of these arts and discoveries I now purpose to show you, under the strictest secrecy; and I believe I may rely on my judgment of men enough to have no distrust of either your interest or your fidelity."

He paused, but I could only nod my head. I have said that I was alarmed, yet to my soul nothing was more deadly than the material daylight world of New York, and whether this man were a harmless eccentric or a wielder of dangerous arts I had no choice save to follow him and slake my sense of wonder on whatever he might have to offer. So I listened.

"To - my ancestor," he softly continued, "there appeared to reside some very remarkable qualities in the will of mankind; qualities having a little-suspected dominance not only over the acts of one's self and of others, but over every variety of force and substance in Nature, and over many elements and Dimensions deemed more universal than Nature herself. May I say that he flouted the sanctity of things as great as space and time and that he put to strange uses the rites of sartain half-breed red Indians once encamped upon this hill? These Indians showed cholera when the place was built, and were plaguy pestilent in asking to visit the grounds at the full of the moon. For years they stole over the wall each month when they could and by stealth performed sartain acts. Then, in '68, the new squire caught them at their doings, and stood still at what he saw. Thereafter he bargained with them and exchanged the free access of his grounds for the exact inwardness of what they did; larning that their grandfathers got part of their custom from red ancestors and part from an old Dutchman in the time of the States-General. And pox on him, I'm afeared the squire must have sarved them monstrous bad rum - whether or not by intent - for a week after he larnt the secret he was the only man living that knew it. You, Sir, are the first outsider to be told there is a secret, and split me if I'd have risked tampering that much with - the powers - had ye not been so hot after bygone things."

I shuddered as the man grew colloquial - and with the familiar speech of another day. He went on.

"But you must know, Sir, that what - the squire - got from those mongrel savages was but a small part of the learning he came to have. He had not been at Oxford for nothing, nor talked to no account with an ancient chymist and astrologer in Paris. He was, in fine, made sensible that all the world is but the smoke of our intellects; past the bidding of the vulgar, but by the wise to be puffed out and drawn in like any cloud of prime Virginia tobacco. What we want, we may make about us; and what we don't want, we may sweep away. I won't say that all this is wholly true in body, but 'tis sufficient true to furnish a very pretty spectacle now and then. You, I conceive, would be tickled by a better sight of sartain other years than your fancy affords you; so be pleased to hold back any fright at what I design to show. Come to the window and be quiet."

My host now took my hand to draw me to one of the two windows on the long side of the malodorous room, and at the first touch of his ungloved fingers I turned cold. His flesh, though dry and firm, was of the quality of ice; and I almost shrank away from his pulling. But again I thought of the emptiness and horror of reality, and boldly prepared to follow whithersoever I might be led. Once at the window, the man drew apart the yellow silk curtains and directed my stare into the blackness outside. For a moment I saw nothing save a myriad of tiny dancing lights, far, far before me. Then, as if in response to an insidious motion of my host's hand, a flash of heat-lightning played over the scene, and I looked out upon a sea of luxuriant foliage - foliage unpolluted, and not the sea of roofs to be expected by any normal mind. On my right the Hudson glittered wickedly, and in the distance ahead I saw the unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh constellated with nervous fireflies. The flash died, and an evil smile illumined the waxy face of the aged necromancer.

"That was before my time - before the new squire's time. Pray let us try again."

I was faint, even fainter than the hateful modernity of that accursed city had made me.

"Good God!" I whispered; "can you do that for *any time*?" And as he nodded, and bared the black stumps of what had once been yellow fangs, I clutched at the curtains to prevent myself from falling. But he steadied me with that terrible, ice-cold claw, and once more made his insidious gesture.

Again the lightning flashed - but this time upon a scene not wholly strange. It was Greenwich, the Greenwich that used to be, with here and there a roof or row of houses as we see it now, yet with lovely green lanes and fields and bits of grassy common. The marsh still glittered beyond, but in the farther distance I saw the steeples of what was then all of New York; Trinity and St. Paul's and the Brick Church dominating their sisters, and a faint haze of wood smoke hovering over the whole. I breathed hard, but not so much from the sight itself as from the possibilities my imagination terrifiedly conjured up.

"Can you - dare you - go *far*?" I spoke with awe, and I think he shared it for a second, but the evil grin returned.

"*Far*? What I have seen would blast ye to a mad statue of stone! Back, back - forward, *forward* - look, ye puling lack-wit!"

And as he snarled the phrase under his breath he gestured anew; bringing to the sky a flash more blinding than either which had come before. For full three seconds I could glimpse that pandemoniac sight, and in those seconds I saw a vista which will ever afterward torment me in dreams. I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon, and devil-lights burning from unnumbered windows. And swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city, robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettledrums, the clatter of obscene crotola, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.

I saw this vista, I say, and heard as with the mind's ear the blasphemous domdaniel of cacophony which companioned it. It was the shrieking fulfilment of all the horror which that corpse-city had ever stirred in my soul, and forgetting every injunction to silence I screamed and screamed and screamed as my nerves gave way and the walls quivered about me.

Then, as the flash subsided, I saw that my host was trembling too: a look of shocking fear half-blotting from his face the serpent distortion of rage which my screams had excited. He

tottered, clutched at the curtains as I had done before, and wriggled his head wildly, like a hunted animal. God knows he had cause, for as the echoes of my screaming died away there came another sound so hellishly suggestive that only numbed emotion kept me sane and conscious. It was the steady, stealthy creaking of the stairs beyond the locked door, as with the ascent of a barefoot or skin-shod horde; and at last the cautious, purposeful rattling of the brass latch that glowed in the feeble candlelight. The old man clawed and spat at me through the mouldy air, and barked things in his throat as he swayed with the yellow curtain he clutched.

"The full moon - damn ye - ye... ye yelping dog - ye called 'em, and they've come for me! Moccasined feet - dead-men - Gad sink ye, ye red devils, but I poisoned no rum o' yours - han't I kept your pox-rotted magic safe? - ye swilled yourselves sick, curse ye, and ye must needs blame the squire - let go, you! Unhand that latch - I've naught for ye here -"

At this point three slow and very deliberate raps shook the panels of the door, and a white foam gathered at the mouth of the frantic magician. His fright, turning to steely despair, left room for a resurgence of his rage against me; and he staggered a step towards the table on whose edge I was steadying myself. The curtains, still clutched in his right hand as his left clawed out at me, grew taut and finally crashed down from their lofty fastenings; admitting to the room a flood of that full moonlight which the brightening of the sky had presaged. In those greenish beams the candles paled, and a new semblance of decay spread over the must-reeking room with its wormy panelling, sagging floor, battered mantel, rickety furniture, and ragged draperies. It spread over the old man, too, whether from the same source or because of his fear and vehemence, and I saw him shrivel and blacken as he lurched near and strove to rend me with vulturine talons. Only his eyes stayed whole, and they glared with a propulsive, dilated incandescence which grew as the face around them charred and dwindled.

The rapping was now repeated with greater insistence, and this time bore a hint of metal. The black thing facing me had become only a head with eyes, impotently trying to wriggle across the sinking floor in my direction, and occasionally emitting feeble little spits of immortal malice. Now swift and splintering blows assailed the sickly panels, and I saw the gleam of a tomahawk as it cleft the rending wood. I did not move, for I could not; but watched dazedly as the door fell in pieces to admit a colossal shapeless influx of inky substance starred with shining, malevolent eyes. It poured thickly, like a flood of oil bursting a rotten bulkhead, overturned a chair as it spread, and finally flowed under the table and across the room to where the blackened head with the eyes still glared at me. Around that head it closed, totally swallowing it up, and in another moment it had begun to recede; bearing away its invisible burden without touching me, and flowing again out of that black doorway and down the unseen stairs, which creaked as before, though in reverse order.

Then the floor gave way at last, and I slid gaspingly down into the nighted chamber below, choking with cobwebs and half-swooning with terror. The green moon, shining through broken windows, showed me the hall door half open, and as I rose from the plaster-strewn floor and twisted myself free from the sagged ceiling, I saw sweep past it an awful torrent of blackness, with scores of baleful eyes glowing in it. It was seeking the door to the cellar, and when it found it, it vanished therein. I now felt the floor of this lower room giving as that of the upper chamber had done, and once a crashing above had been followed by the fall past the west window of something which must have been the cupola. Now liberated for the instant from the wreckage, I rushed through the hall to the front door; and finding myself unable to open it, seized a chair and broke a window, climbing frenziedly out upon the unkempt lawn where moonlight danced over yard-high grass and weeds. The wall was high, and all the gates were

locked; but moving a pile of boxes in a corner I managed to gain the top and cling to the great stone urn set there.

About me in my exhaustion I could see only strange walls and windows and old gambrel roofs. The steep street of my approach was nowhere visible, and the little I did see succumbed rapidly to a mist that rolled in from the river despite the glaring moonlight. Suddenly the urn to which I clung began to tremble, as if sharing my own lethal dizziness; and in another instant my body was plunging downward to I knew not what fate.

The man who found me said that I must have crawled a long way despite my broken bones, for a trail of blood stretched off as far as he dared to look. The gathering rain soon effaced this link with the scene of my ordeal, and reports could state no more than that I had appeared from a place unknown, at the entrance of a little black court off Perry Street.

I never sought to return to those tenebrous labyrinths, nor would I direct any sane man thither if I could. Of who or what that ancient creature was, I have no idea; but I repeat that the city is dead and full of unsuspected horrors. Whither he has gone, I do not know; but I have gone home to the pure New England lanes up which fragrant sea-winds sweep at evening.

THE STRANGE CASE OF LEMUEL JENKINS

by Philip M. Fisher, Jnr.

More and more the density of population and the complexity of life are forcing the individual to conform. The tendency to be absorbed in the crowd, to move with the current, to allow our emotions and ambitions to be dictated by the mob breathing and flowing around us, is daily growing more difficult to resist. In this story we read of a man who sought to plumb this thesis to its utmost - and found more than he'd bargained for.

WE were just getting into the full swing of our morning constitutional through the campus when suddenly, without any reason that I could see, Burns came to an abrupt halt. A moment he stood thus, stiff, alert, questioning, as a good pointer will in the sage. Then he half raised his cane and pointed.

"Do you see that chap on the bench over there, P.M.?" he questioned.

I followed his direction, and smiled.

"If you mean that rather forlorn and washed-out rag some careless keeper has thrown over the green slats - why, yes," I answered.

"Well," he went on, "that rag, as you call it, is a man for all your brilliant wit - and a queer enough one, too. It is Lemuel Jenkins."

Burns whispered this last bit of information as though he expected me to start with wonder at the announcement.

"Ah - Lemuel Jenkins," I repeated dryly. Yet, nevertheless, I surveyed with some curiosity the woebegone individual of whom we spoke, for I knew something of my companion's propensity for forming strange friendships. And I could not help but add, for the sake of bringing the story I suspected: "Rather extraordinary name that - Lemuel Jenkins. Must be a Russian platinum prince at least. Or some other of the experienced persons you so love to -"

"Stop!" whispered my friend fiercely. Then he seized my arm. "Come over and meet the man. Observe the way he greets me - observe it carefully, every detail. I'll talk a bit so you can do it. Then we'll leave him to his bench and I'll tell you something - something more."

I shrugged my shoulders, for I never cared to show too sudden an interest in Burns's adventures. I did that, once, and in ten seconds he had sputtered excitedly an extraordinary tale with a metaphysical background, that properly worked up, should have kept me on edge for a

good solid hour. If there is anything about this limp, thin-backed scarecrow huddled before us, I reflected now, let it come slowly and with relish.

"Watch everything he does," cautioned Burns once more, as he stepped into the crunching sand of the drive - "his manner - everything."

At the sound of our feet a tremor ran over the stranger. Then slowly, still gathered into himself like a scared rabbit, he twisted his head about, and his eyes met mine. Those eyes! Shall I ever forget the look of wild pleading, the haunting fear, the desperate hope, that swam in those deep-set glowing eyes. The desperate hope - then as my own eyes held steadily upon them, as in truth I could not now prevent, the sudden terror which submerged that hope, and flooded out what rational light the stranger's eyes had held. I felt Burns's fingers press tighter on my arm.

Then the tortured eyes flitted fearfully to my companion, and behold - another transformation! For they lit up on the instant; the terror was overflowed by such swift relief as might shine in those of a sea-maddened castaway when at last he spies the sail. This light brightened, burned with a joy that was good to see, and my heart gave a great throb of sympathy, though as yet I did not understand. I glanced at my companion. Was Burns not going to speak to the man? Why did he stare at the unhappy creature so blankly - as if he were not before us at all? I shifted back to the stranger on the bench, in time to see the light in his eyes grow dark again beneath a smooth black wave of returning desperation, of fear, of blasted hope.

A moment thus, I know not why, I was in agony for him as Burns's steady stare concentrated on the shrubbery immediately behind the bench. Then suddenly Burns pressed my arm again, started rather violently, and precipitously thrust out his hand.

"Why" - he cried explosively - "why there you are - Jenkins! Good old Lem Jenkins! I didn't expect you would be here."

The tide of eager joy that swept all else from the man's face then was glorious. Lemuel Jenkins untangled himself and snapped up as though my companion's words had touched a hidden spring. He seized Burns's hands both in his and wrung them in feverish joviality.

"Oh!" he gasped - "I was afraid -"

Burns withdrew one hand and clapped it on the other's shoulder. He seemed quite to ignore the man's words.

"I am glad you're here," he cried. Then he seized my arm with an extra pressure I understood. "Here" - he said to the man - "I want you two good friends of mine to meet." He introduced us.

The hand I pressed clung to mine an appreciably longer moment than was necessary, and the man's eyes glowed on mine rather strangely until I nodded and smiled. Then Mr. Jenkins smiled, too brightly, then loosened his grip and seized Burns's hand again. With a glance at me my companion engaged him in a bit of light chatter, in which, in Burns's voice at least, I thought I discerned a slight undercurrent of effort to put the stranger at his ease. Then he held out his hand again.

"Good-by, Lem," he said, smiling peculiarly. Then added - "Awfully glad to have seen you."

I was watching Mr. Jenkins as Burns said these last words. The man started again, and I saw once more a flash of pain flit across his eyes, Then his mouth tightened, he stiffened his shoulders, and returned with emphasis:

"Yes, my friend, I am glad you saw me."

I then muttered some sort of appreciation of our meeting, and we left. After a dozen paces or so I followed Burns's hint and glanced back. The man was still standing with his eager eyes yet fixed upon us. Burns nudged me again.

"Wave to him - quick!" he almost ordered. And as we did, the man's face lit up again with that most curiously happy smile. His arm went up spasmodically in answer - then dropped wearily as he slumped back to his bench.

We crunched on, I deep in thought. So this was Lemuel Jenkins, was it? Well, who is Lemuel Jenkins, anyway? Why does he huddle shabbily on a campus bench at this early morning hour? Why that appealing shadow in his eyes, that hope that seemed so often to have met rebuff, that look that one so often sees in a lost dog searching for his master, or just for a friendly face? Why the sudden light in them when at last Burns spoke? And why the man's manner towards me, a manner that was suggestive of apprehension lest I refuse to notice him, or to shake his hand? Why the pain at Burns's last words - and the misplaced emphasis of Jenkins' own farewell when he had repeated after Burns:

"Yes, my friend, I *am* glad you saw me."

I shrugged my shoulders - just another of Burns's haphazard pick-ups, I decided. Just another stranded individual who at one time or another had poured his story into the ever-eager ears of my friend. I found myself wondering what that story might be. Just another - a quick sigh from my companion interrupted my thoughts.

"Well," he said, as I turned to him questioningly, "that was Lemuel Jenkins."

Evidently no answer was desired, or was necessary. I simply nodded and walked on.

"You watched him?" Burns continued.

In noncommittal silence I nodded again.

"Then you saw what I wanted you to see, of course," my friend went on. "You saw the changes while I paused before him as though in doubt whether to recognize him or not. You saw -"

It was my turn to interrupt.

"You did that on purpose?" I could not help but cry. "You tortured him on?"

Burns seized my arm again.

"I wanted you to believe what I'm about to tell you," he declared earnestly. "I wanted you to believe. And in order to believe you must see - see for yourself. So I held poor Jenkins in suspense a few moments before I let him know I saw him. And he acted as I suspected he would - and you *saw*."

I could hardly withhold my temper at the almost cold-blooded manner in which Burns recited his case.

"But his eyes!" I cried. "The desperation, the hope, then the horrible terror when you stared straight through him. It wasn't right, man, to treat him so; to cut so old an acquaintance as you say -"

Burns swung upon me.

"Cut him!" he exploded, his face suddenly red, and his eyes snapping angrily. "I wasn't going to cut Jenkins - I wasn't even cutting him for the moment. We're too old friends for that. Why, Jenkins wasn't hurt because he thought I was going to cut him, or because he thought that I didn't for the moment recognize him. Jenkins knows that as well as I do. Jenkins -"

"Then why did he palpitate so?" I persisted. "What was it held him in suspense that way? And why was he suddenly so happy when finally you spoke, if it was not because he thought at first that you wouldn't notice him hunched there on his bench?"

Burns smiled gravely.

"Now you're getting to the point, old man," he said. "Jenkins didn't fear that I wouldn't recognize him - hardly. But Jenkins *did* fear that I wouldn't notice him."

I jerked my shoulders.

"What's the difference?"

"Difference, P.M.?" Burns went on coolly. "Well, I'll ask you a question: does one ever notice something which one cannot see?"

I stared.

"Which one cannot see?" I repeated.

"That's what I said," nodded my companion gravely. "And Jenkins -"

I interrupted with great scorn.

"And Jenkins was afraid you couldn't *see* him, eh? Not afraid you wouldn't, but couldn't. Bah! I've heard other yarns of yours, remember. The next thing you'll be telling me is that Jenkins thought you were mad, or blind, or some such. Or else -" I paused a moment before throwing my capping bit of sarcasm.

"Go on," ordered Burns gravely. "Be logical - go on."

"Or else that Jenkins thought that he himself could not be seen. That he himself was - oh, nonsense! You're gaming me, old fellow, and I don't like it; particularly after seeing the real pain in that poor chap's eyes."

Burns swung about.

"We will take this other path back through the campus and I'll tell you about our friend yonder," he answered. "You saw how Jenkins acted - that at least you saw, and must believe. Now I'll tell you why." Burns glanced across the eucalyptus Campanile clock. "We have time aplenty, and I'll tell you why."

"Jenkins was, or rather is, a biologist here at the university, and very sane about his work - as he was, and still is, about everything he does. Too sane, almost, and too determined to make himself a name in it. A man can be that way, you know - too sane; too sanely strong in his beliefs."

Burns struck his stick at a bit of shrubbery. Then shrugged his shoulders and muttered once more: "Yes, too sane, the man is. And too deadly logical. That's what put that look in his eyes, or rather helped put it there."

I interrupted.

"You mean he - overworked?"

My companion shook his head.

"No - not that. It was due to his logic that he drew the conclusion which made him what he is. You see, not only is he so sanely logical, so doggedly in earnest when on the trail of a great idea, but he is also impressionable. You saw that."

I nodded and reflected in memory upon the strange man's eyes.

"Yes," I repeated. "I saw that. The man is impressionable - now at least."

Burns looked at me gravely.

"He was then, too. Sanity, logic, imagination, impressionability - characteristics that make great scientists - he had them all. And they made him grow in his work even as they should - and his promise was great: Hall of Fame, you know, and all that. Then came the final irony of their concerted action - or reaction, whatever you may call it." Burns swung his stick again and carefully lifted a curling bit of eucalyptus bark from our path. Then, as if to himself: "And now - poor Jenkins, poor chap." Then louder - "And yet he still hangs on here at the university - and he's going to make out. Getting over it right along. You should have seen him, his eyes - a month ago."

I muttered something to the effect that for my own sanity's sake I was glad I had not.

"You know," Burns ran on, "it happened only a month ago - or just over it. Four weeks last Tuesday, to be exact. That's why I thought maybe you'd heard."

"In the depths of the Humboldt redwoods one doesn't hear much," I answered. "Stage once a week, not even papers -"

"Of course, I had forgotten," my companion apologized quickly. "And we kept it out of the papers," he exclaimed rather bitterly. "No use having them make fools of us all. And we had to think of poor Jenkins, too. His position - we had to keep it from the papers. We had to -"

"We could do it easily enough, too. It happened at the club, you know - in the low-ceilinged walnut smoking-room. You know how secluded that dark-panelled retreat is - and how cool and soothing. And how soft are the lights, and all. I never sink into one of those deep-cushioned lounge chairs by that heavy, deep-toned table that I don't feel a great peace stealing over me. It even mellows men's voices - mellows their thoughts, too - allows the imagination to slide smoothly along without the slightest hitch. If one of the boys wants to untangle a business snarl, or work out his lectures, or get inspiration and quiet for a story - that's the place. And that's where this thing occurred to Lemuel Jenkins. That's the place - cool, dark, soothing."

Burns eyed me gravely, reflectively.

"You saw his eyes - you believe *them* at least. I wonder if you -"

"Go on!" I cried. "Go on!"

"Well," said Burns, after a deep breath, as we passed a clump of fragrant golden acacia. "we were lounging in the half gloom pulling slowly on our cigars, and just saturated with the calm and comfort of it all. It was early in the evening. Dinner had been soul-satisfying, digestions were content, the mutual satisfaction of mutual peace and physical ease did not lend itself to conversation. Now and then one of the fellows - there were only the usual half dozen, you know - would drop a single word and a low chuckle would run about the group, a chuckle that was as rich and low and soothing, too, as of waters in one of your deep-hid redwood canons, P. M. This, with an occasional long-drawn sigh, or the light shift of cushion springs as one leaned to flick his ash, were the only sounds.

"Suddenly - and it broke as startlingly loud as a lion's scream from that same black Humboldt cañon of yours, old man - suddenly, I say, from the depths of his own precious chair, Jenkins's fist leaped out and crashed down upon the table. At the same time he cried explosively:

" 'It can be done - it *can* be! I say it is possible - it can be done!' "

Burns paused a moment reflectively, then turned to me with a dry smile.

"Do you think that lion's screech would startle you?" he asked softly. "Coming in the everlasting peace of a damp, gloomy, Humboldt forest?"

My appreciative smile was sufficient answer.

"Then" - my companion went on - "then you will understand how that crashing fist hit us. And understand, too, just why we tried the trick on him a few minutes later - the trick that turned out so weirdly awful, and that brought Jenkins to what you saw on the bench back there."

"Go on," I said again.

"Well," Burns continued, "I can still see the startled white faces and staring eyes against the dark of the half-lit room as every manjack of us was jerked bolt upright out of his reverie. Then, as we stared, the man's fist came down again, and once more, as though half in argument with his own doubts, Jenkins cried:

" 'I say it *is* possible - it can be done. And, by Heaven, I'll find the way!' "

"Ridges - Ridges, M.D., you know him, P.M. - finally lay back among his cushions, drew a long breath through his black cigar, and drawled in as insulting a tone as he could muster:

" 'Have it your own way, my unfortunate biologist. Have it your own way.' "

Jenkins' eyes snapped.

" 'You don't believe it?' " he cried.

"Ridges chuckled. Harvey Gilson, opposite me, laughed loudly.

" 'Been dissecting somethin' extra old this aft', old man? Fumes, or somethin', seem to have - ' "Ridges cut in again with a chuckle.

"Perhaps," he drawled again - 'perhaps if our vehement friend would propound his argument without first half stunning us, and would explain just what it is that can be done, and why, we might understand why he is so certain of his own ability to find the way.'

"Ridges could talk thus to him, you know," Burns went on in an aside to me - "he had introduced Jenkins to our little circle and felt responsible - naturally. And Jenkins we had come to like, he was, still is, so deucedly earnest about things - You saw his eyes."

I nodded, for the vision of them was yet clear; too clear.

"Well," my friend went on, "Jenkins blinked rather wildly at Ridges a moment, then with his hands clutching at the chair arms as though he were about to leap at us, he turned slowly about and tensely looked each of us in the eye. Then abruptly he nodded. He leaned toward me.

" 'Give me your glasses,' he demanded with a snap.

I drew them from my case, and handed them over.

Jenkins held them high that all might see.

" 'There!' he cried, and waved his other hand dramatically.

"Ridges chuckled again.

" 'Ah, yes,' he murmured - 'there - there.'

" 'Can't you see?' shouted Jenkins, appealing to the rest of us.

"I nodded.

"If you drop those glasses I'll have to see something pretty substantial, my friend," I said, for the thunder of his fist explosion still jangled on my nerves.

"But you can see right through them,' cried Jenkins as he belittled my attempt at wit with a deprecatory wave of his hand. 'You put them over your eyes to aid your sight. You see right through them. And yet they're made of a solid substance, concrete, hard; one of the densest compounds known, glass is. And yet you use it to aid your sight - to *aid* it.'

"Well, for a moment I thought the man's study had made him suddenly mad. Then his eyes turned steadily again upon mine, and I saw that I was wrong - quite wrong.

"Gilson laughed loudly again.

" 'Burns certainly doesn't use them for blinkers, Mr. Jenkins,' he bellowed heartlessly.

"Ridges was silent. Yet when at last Jenkins's gaze shifted from mine I saw that Ridges was chewing his cigar very reflectively. He knew Lemuel Jenkins better than we, then.

" 'And yet,' the little biologist went on, still holding my glasses high - 'and yet you can see through the stuff - a solid mineral substance.'

"This time we all nodded. I don't know why, but I suppose it was because we all felt the man was in dead earnest about something. We nodded. And Jenkins smiled.

" 'And so,' he went on - 'and so I say: it can be done - it is possible.'

"He smiled again upon us, and with such an air of gentle condescension that I felt a renewed resentment over our sudden disturbance arise. I glanced about at the others and saw enough to convince me that they, too, felt as did I. Our peace had been interrupted. Yet Hathaway, who had not yet spoken, fidgeted in his chair, and turned his cigar over and over in his hands as he stared at the glasses Jenkins had laid upon the table.

" 'You mean -?' he hinted.

" 'Did you ever see a jellyfish?' demanded Jenkins.

" 'Yes - yes!' exclaimed Hathaway.

" 'Umph!' came a soft grunt from Ridges as he pulled at his cigar.

" 'Like glass -' Jenkins went on.

"Young Gilson roared.

" 'He's going to make eye-glasses out of jellyfish! Oh, Lord - ha, ha, ha. Eye-glasses out of jellyfish!'

"Hathaway speared the youngster a glance. Then turned back to Jenkins, who was restlessly tapping the table top, and spoke quickly:

" 'And the jellyfish is as transparent as the glass - and yet is not a mineral substance like that lens, but is organic, is animal!' he prompted quickly.

"Jenkins smiled.

" 'You've got my point,' he commanded, and nodded again in his new condescending way. 'The jellyfish is as clear as glass, and yet is a live animal organism, a living body. I was working on one this morning and the thought occurred to me,'

"He paused a moment. Ridges gave another soft grunt. Gilson turned upon me his humorous eye. Thoughtful Hathaway groped among the rugs for his cigar. I began to feel slightly uncomfortable. Then Jenkins went on.

" 'As I cut the thing up it occurred to me: if this animal can live and be transparent, quite invisible indeed when in its natural element, then why are there not other animals existing in the same condition?'

"Hathaway leaned forward.

" 'Yes, yes!' he breathed again.

"Jenkins waved his hand melodramatically now.

" 'And why cannot there be found, say by a more open-minded organic chemistry, or a more profound and analytical study of biological processes, some substance which will render any animal body - even your own, say - absolutely invisible. Invisible,' he repeated, 'and yet, nevertheless allow it yet to live.'

"Having delivered himself of this rather astounding notion, he leaned back, picked up his forgotten cigar, and calmly surveyed us as we stared. Gilson it was who first broke the silence with some absurd criticism - but he subsided at another glance from Hathaway.

" 'That's what I mean when I say: it can be done!' repeated Jenkins smoothly again. 'And I believe it, I believe it - the thing can be done. The only question is: how?' He paused a moment, then shot another question. 'Did you ever see one of these little lizards that take on the colour of their surroundings?'

"Hathaway leaned forward.

" 'A chameleon?' he exclaimed. 'You put one on a green leaf and he turns green, on yellow sand and he becomes yellow; in mottled shadow, and he at once changes colour to suit? I've seen them, yes.'

"Jenkins leaned back in satisfaction.

" 'What's to prevent them becoming quite transparent then, if that will help them any better?' he said quietly, cocking one eyebrow sagely.

"Gilson broke into another roar of laughter - yet, somehow, in it I felt I discerned an undercurrent of something that was not his usual whole-hearted fun. Gilson was beginning to think, perhaps, and the laughter was a cover. That, however, I cannot say. At any rate, he leaned forward and cried, with well-dissembled horror in his voice:

" 'And you could feel it wriggle in your hand, that slimy lizard, and yet not be able to see it?'

"Ridges shivered in his chair. Jenkins's eyes lit up - as they did when I recognized him at last to-day.

" 'Why not?' he snapped.

"Ridges cleared his throat.

" 'Then' - he said, speaking for the first time since Jenkins's idea had really dawned upon us - 'then you believe that a human being could by some means become transparent and yet still live? In other words, that he might sit just as you are sitting, in that chair there, and we could see the sinking of the cushions, the depression made by his body - and yet he, himself, or you, could not be seen. Would be invisible?'

"Jenkins nodded, and let his eye move about the group. Hathaway appeared lost in thought. Even Gilson said no word. The others simply stared at the little biologist as though he had suddenly lost his wits.

" 'Why not?' snapped Jenkins again.

"Ridges shifted in his chair.

" 'And so you believe something could be found that, injected into a man, say, or if he were bathed in it, would do him no harm, and yet would make him invisible?' he questioned earnestly.

" 'Place some oil on paper, and it makes it almost transparent, doesn't it?' Jenkins defended eagerly. "If something that would so affect animal bodies could be found, and a man would work his mind to accept the thing, really deep in his subconscious mind and without that ever-present subconscious doubt with which we are so prone to unconsciously combat new ideas, accept it, believe it - the thing could be done. Like the jellyfish, the oiled paper, the chameleon - he would become quite invisible. That' - concluded Jenkins with a grave nod - 'that is the idea that came to me in the lab this morning. And the impression of that new idea was so strong that I found myself wondering how it was that I had never thought of the thing before. So strong, that I can say that I, for one, deep down really do believe the thing is possible."

"Hathaway looked up squarely at Jenkins a moment, then just as gravely nodded and spoke.

" 'Nothing - he said in a quiet tone - nothing, in this day and age, absolutely nothing is impossible.'

"So solemnly did the words follow Jenkins's declaration that I felt a curious little tingling all over my skin. Even Gilson stared moodily at the table top. Then abruptly Jenkins stood up and stretched.

" 'I phone Santa Cruz for some white jellyfish at noon to-day, just after I became convinced about it. They have made no answer yet, as I required. If - if you gentlemen will excuse me just a moment, I - I wish to - to -'

"When the heavy door had rumbled shut behind him, and the smoke-hazed room once more become the silent, cave-like haunt of soothing quiet, we looked into each other's eyes. As I reflected on the dim-lit faces before me I wondered what was going on in the mind behind each. I wondered what the calmly puffing Ridges thought in that deep well of sarcasm and mockery hid behind his snapping black eyes. I wondered what Hathaway saw with that far-away look he directed towards a half-observed corner of the ceiling as idly he twisted the cigar in his two hands. I wondered just what care-free witticism was ready to leap from the tip of Harvey Gilson's ready tongue as he stared down at the table top. I wondered if the sobering influence of Jenkins's earnestness was yet upon him.

"As for my own conclusion, P. M., as to that, I must confess I really had none. I hadn't yet had time. Jenkins, so Ridges had told us all often enough before finally we bid the biologist into the club, was highly imaginative, most sensitively impressionable, as openminded as nature itself, and ever ready to receive any new development of modern science. I knew one thing, of

course, and of that was absolutely certain - Jenkins was not playing with us. He really did believe in his new idea. But as yet all I could do was simply to keep open-minded myself and await developments.

"And then again the soothing, twilight silence of our room was broken. This time by Ridges at the far opposite angle of the great walnut table.

" 'Well?' he questioned. And with the one word was silent.

"All cleared their throats.

" 'What do you think?' Again the drawling voice was that of Ridges.

"For several minutes again there was deep, thinking, silence. Then, with a harsh laugh, Gilson spoke.

" 'I've an idea - might do some good.' The words were directed at Ridges.

" 'Some good?' questioned the latter, as he raised his brows.

Gilson laughed again - this time a delicious laugh that rounded out into a deep chuckle of pure enjoyment that was a relief to all of us. The tingling of my skin was swept away by a general feeling of certainty and saneness.

" 'Humph, humph,' chuckled Gilson again. 'He says things can be made invisible, Jenkins does - and believes it. *Believes it*. Says he's going to practise on jellyfish 'til he finds the cause of their transparency, and then is goin' to apply it to other animals. Humph - I've got the idea all right.'

"Ridges lay down his cigar and carefully wiped his lips with his handkerchief.

" 'Well?' he hinted, with his old sarcastic drawl again in evidence.

" 'Old Jenkins believes it can be done,' repeated young Gilson. 'Believes animals, men, could be quite invisible. Lucky he's so mad to get those jellyfish people on the phone. Gives us our chance.'

"Gilson paused and surveyed us with a widespread grin. Hathaway frowned. Ridges tapped the table.

" 'Well?' the latter hinted again, his black little eyes intent upon the youngster beside me.

" 'He believes it might be done even by himself,' repeated Gilson. Then threw out his arms - 'Well, why not?'

"We stared, and the man chuckled.

" 'Say!' he cried - 'the way his fist crashed down on that table left me half deaf. And here's our chance. When Jenkins comes back we won't see him, see? He may talk, and we'll look surprised. But we can't see him. He'll have suddenly become invisible, see? Just work that game on him and soon enough he'll get sick of the idea - and we'll get even to boot. His -'

"A loud cry suddenly broke in upon the would-be joker. It was Hathaway, his face as white against the sombre background as the moon behind scudding clouds, his cigar crushed in his fist.

" 'No, no, no! Not that, not that!' he cried, actual agony in his voice - 'I wouldn't do *that!*'

"Gilson's jaw dropped. Then he threw back his head and whooped.

" 'You'll make the best actor of the bunch,' he cried, 'if you keep that face and that voice.'

"Hathaway swallowed convulsively.

" 'But - but I mean it. I - I -'

"Gilson turned from him with a nod and a grin.

"'You fellows get me, then? When we hear Jenkins at the door we'll all be looking at something else. Then when we turn about we'll expect to see Jenkins, and - he won't be there.'

" 'Oh!' gasped Hathaway, staring with his white face. I was not so sure as Gilson that the man was acting - it was too real. But the joker ran on.

" 'We'll be horribly surprised at his condition, of course, and talk. And poor Jenkins, he'll sit there, and - oh, I tell you, he'll soon get enough -'

"Again came a cry from Hathaway.

" 'No, no, gentlemen, don't do that. Don't do it. Jenkins might - Jenkins believes - he -' The man's voice broke.

"Ridges caught my eye a moment, and elevated a brow. Then he nodded questioningly towards Hathaway. I shrugged my shoulders - I felt it would be better to let things take their course without my interference, and would rather leave the matter in Ridges's hands - he knew Jenkins. Ridges contemplated the half-frightened man a moment, then spoke decidedly.

"'It can do no harm. Besides, we do owe friend Lemuel Jenkins something for scaring us with that crash upon the table. It can do no harm. And I know Lem Jenkins. I know -'

"'Great!' cried Gilson. 'It's a go, then. And it'll cure the man of this fool notion as well. Jenkins -'

"Hathaway leaned forward almost pleadingly.

" 'Don't do it,' he whispered huskily.

" 'But why not?' snapped Gilson.

"Hathaway shrugged his shoulders.

" 'I don't know - I can't quite understand, myself. I - I just wouldn't, that's all. Oh, I wouldn't -'

" 'Nonsense!' cried Gilson, determined now to carry his point through.

"Hathaway threw up his hands and leaned stiffly back in his chair. The rest of us stared thoughtfully at the ceiling a moment. Then Gilson, all enthusiasm again, continued.

" 'See what he does,' he cried. 'See if he thinks of this morning's idea. See how he likes it all. And above all, be serious about it. You fellows must act your parts.'

"Ridges cleared his throat. One of the other two men, I forget which, lit a new cigar, and I saw his hand tremble with the match. Then we heard softly muffled steps approaching. Ridges sprang up and poked at the coals on the hearth. Gilson leaped up to his side.

" 'He's coming,' he whispered, and his voice had become suddenly quite serious. 'Remember, everybody - don't give the thing away - serious - serious.'

"Hathaway stiffened forward.

" 'I wouldn't - I -'

"But Ridges turned from the hearth and snapped his black eyes, and Hathaway leaned back once more. Then, as the door slid open, Ridges spoke as if in answer to me.

"If a man believes a thing strongly enough, then, you would say he could do, or be, what he believes. That about right?"

"I nodded dumbly. Then I caught the point.

"'Absolutely.' I agreed. Then I quoted: 'That which a man in his heart believes, he is.' There's more in some of those ancient sayings than we think. It's not all surface talk. It's not all figurative language. Some of it is meant to be taken literally, and I believe that little saying is one of that kind - a man really is, or does in time become, that which he persistently and consistently thinks he is. It's absolutely literal truth. It's the same old thing of the mind dominating the body - the world - old truth.

"No one paid the slightest attention to Jenkins, who had slid in a quietly preoccupied manner into his deep chair, and was now intently gazing at the wrapper of his cigar.

"Gilson by the hearth chuckled. Hathaway had risen stiffly, and his back was towards me as he faced the glowing hearth with the others. Gilson questioned softly.

"Power of the mind, you say - even to turning invisible?"

"That was the cue. Ridges gave a queer hunch and bent over the fire, at which he began to assiduously poke with the tongs.

"Ask Jenkins,' he tossed carelessly over his shoulder.

"Jenkins, slumped in his chair, and as I could see from the tail of my eye, had really been following the conversation, trying to get the thread of it, now raised his head.

"Ask what?' he queried in a low voice.

"Ridges bent and picked at the coals.

"Yes,' he repeated, as though no answer had been made by anyone - 'ask Jenkins.'

"Gilson half turned and gave me a twinkling glance. Jenkins had fallen back into his cushions again.

"I would if he were here,' I answered with a slight yawn.

"Jenkins, who was seated not two steps down the table, looked up quickly.

"Well?" he hinted, staring at me.

"Ridges turned slowly, and blinkingly surveyed the darkened room. His eyes even rested a moment upon the unsuspecting little biologist.

"Why,' he muttered, half apologetically, 'I thought Jenkins had come back.' Jenkins's face changed slightly, and a queer bit of interest flickered in his eyes. 'I thought he'd come back. That's strange. Surely -' Ridges hesitated a moment, and glared absently at Jenkins's chair. Then quickly continued: "But when he does come we'll get an opinion worth while. I tell you, gentlemen, and I tell it in all seriousness, when Lemuel Jenkins gets a hunch, as Gilson here would say, why look out! He generally knows what he's talking about. And when he says now that a thing can live and yet be invisible, he means it - and it's mighty likely to be truth. When he comes back -'

"Jenkins looked up rather puzzled a moment. Then laughed - a bit loudly. Ridges looked about and frowned.

" 'That door' - he hesitated again - 'I'd swear I heard it open a moment ago.'

"He stared about at us.

" 'Who laughed just now?' he demanded harshly, and his voice held a frightened note. His acting was perfect, his face a marvel of expression. 'Who laughed - which one of you?' he cried.

"Jenkins cackled queerly. Then as our eyes all centred unseeingly upon him, his eyes widened upon us in a way that was more than bewildered.

" 'There!' cried Ridges again, coming back from the door. "Again!" He glared at us savagely. "Who did that? Who's playing a joke on us, anyway? That door - Jenkins must have come in. Must be something of a ventriloquist, though I never suspected it. Or are you fellows putting up a game on *me*?" He paused a moment, then suddenly cried: 'Look back of that screen, Hathaway. You, Burns, over behind those heavy portières. He must -' Ridges broke off again and stared again directly at Jenkins. The latter's face was quite pale now, and held such a half-bewildered, half-frightened expression, that my heart almost played me false. His mouth opened and closed convulsively, and he appeared to be trying to swallow. But whether it was from actual fright, or overwhelming anger at us for attempting a practical joke, I could not then guess. If I had known then, certainly I would not have allowed things to go on.

"Ridges bent and glanced under the table. When he straightened up his own face was red and angry, and his eyes flashed.

" 'Jenkins!' he cried, with his eyes roving wildly about the room. 'Here, you, Lee, turn up all the lights. Damned if that madman's talk about invisibility hasn't put the creeps into my bones. Jenkins! Jenkins!'

"By now the little biologist had shrunk back a huddled heap in his great chair. His eyes shone white, and his hands were fastened talon-like upon the upholstery of the chair-arms. I saw now that the man's impressionability had gotten away with him - either that or terrible rage. At any rate, I knew now that we had gone too far.

" 'I say,' I huskily whispered to Ridges; 'I say, we've gone far enough.'

"Ridges purposely misunderstood my words.

" 'I should say he has. Lord - all the lights on, Lee! I said all. I want to *see*. Jenkins! Jenkins! By all that's holy, I'll -'

"He stopped short, for he had rested his hand over that of the shrunken scientist as it so whitely gripped the chair-arm. His face then positively awed me. The surprise, the fear, then the utter horror that shone in it as his hand closed upon that of Jenkins. His breath came short. All the others stared, too. Their acting was more than admirable, though it was to be expected in a group of men of the university type, perhaps. Even Hathaway - white-faced.

" 'God!' gasped Ridges, and his other hand leaped out to me. 'Feel - feel!' Then loudly, harshly: 'Jenkins!'

"The miserable man in the chair at last found his voice. "'Here - here I am. Here - don't you see me? *Can't* you see me?' Then as we all stared wildly unbelieving: 'Oh, for God's sake some one say you're just gaming me; oh, say it, say it!'

"I started forward to seize the man by his hand and assure him that I did indeed see him, but Ridges held my arm. Jenkins sank back with his hands over his eyes.

" 'Oh, my God!' he moaned. 'What has happened to me, what has *happened* to me?'

"Ridges felt blindly for the huddled form. Then as his hands again encountered Jenkins's body, he gave a startled exclamation, and fell back.

" 'Lem-Lemuel-is-is-it you?' he gasped. 'You - there?'

"The little biologist in the chair sobbed.

" 'They can't - can't see me. They can't - can't - they - they -'

"The others burst into excited chatter. But I could stand the fooling no longer. I seized one of Jenkins's hands and turned to Ridges.

" 'This must stop now!' I whispered hotly. 'It's gone far enough. You'll have the man mad in another moment. You'll -'

"Then I was aware that Ridges's eyes were not upon mine, but were fixed glassily upon Jenkins beside me. Glassily with real, and not simulated, horror and consternation and unbelief. And the room was suddenly quite still. I glanced at the others unconsciously and beheld them, too, with eyes intent, as in hypnosis, upon Jenkins. Then came another loud cry. It was Hathaway, though how I recognized his voice I do not know: for it was not his own, but a veritable wail of pain and pity.

" 'Ah - look! Look! He's going - go -'

"My own eyes shifted dully to soothe the man in the chair. That queer prickling sensation I had felt before crept over me again. I wheeled quickly about. Then, with my heart bounding within me, and my vocal cords suddenly paralysed, I realized that I could not, in truth, see the man in the chair. Distinctly, as I stared at the others, came Jenkins's voice at my back.

" 'My hand - you've twisted it!'

"Still I had the man's hand in mine. I looked down at it - and saw nothing. My clutch froze spasmodically about some solid object in its grip - yet that object, solid, warm, throbbing with life, I could not see. All Hathaway's words of warning, all memories of Jenkins's own impressionable nature, all his theory of man's mental power over his own body, came rushing in upon me. One word tore from him in a loud scream:

" '*Jenkins!*'

" 'Oh!' came the voice from the empty chair beside me. 'They can't see me - they *can't see* me. They can't!' Then, in sudden shriek of horror: 'And I can't see myself. I can't - ah - h'

"Jenkins's voice trailed off in a sob.

"Gilson, pale as death now, sweat glistening on his face, stood with hands out-stretched and quivering. A single drop of blood stood out in vivid contrast upon his lower lip. Ridges was on his knees in an instant pawing madly at what seemed the space between the arms of Jenkins's chair. Hathaway had sunk down, and with head buried in his arms moaned over and over and over again:

" 'I knew it! I warned you! Oh, fool that I was to even let you try. Fool, fool, fool! Poor Jenkins. It was not right - not right. I told you - it was not good to try it. He was so in earnest - he believed. We should not have done it - I - I - we - oh, my God, what have we done! What have we done!'

"His words were more in prayer than fear or reproach. Had a stranger at that moment entered the room he must have put us down at once as a group of men suddenly gone mad. By this time I, too, was desperately patting and shaking the thing that was so warmly alive beneath

my hands, the thing that we could not see and yet which must be Lemuel Jenkins - Lemuel Jenkins, stricken with terror and woe and desperation, and as invisible to our sight as the very air itself."

Burns paused in his story and swung his stick at a twig projecting from the golden acacia beside the path. He turned gravely to me then, for I had given a slight exclamation of incredulity. Then he said quickly:

"You saw him there on the bench, P.M. You saw what he is now. His eyes - you saw."

"Yes," I repeated. "I saw his eyes."

"You saw the desperation in them, the terror, then the hope as he searched our faces. Then the utter torture in them as I stared unseeingly at the bushes behind him."

"Yes," I repeated again. "I saw that." Burns nodded.

"I - we could not at first believe ourselves. Thought Jenkins had seen through our joke and was turning the trick on us. Had hypnotized us into really believing we couldn't see him - he liked to dabble in hypnotism, you know; anything psychological, mental. But it wasn't so - Jenkins wasn't playing any trick - he had suspected us of none. He had taken our own play in undoubting seriousness. The thing gripped his mind, conscious and subconscious. And we've never told him either. Never will - at least, I won't.

"I remember Ridges turning to me with a face like grey death.

" 'We've done it now,' he whispered, brokenly fierce. 'We've done it now. I didn't dream of - of this.' He shot a glare at Gilson, who now, too, was frantically pawing at Jenkins's chair. 'Young fool,' he exclaimed bitterly. 'He'd better be conscience stricken - we all had.' A moment Ridges paused. Then, turning quickly: 'Jenkins!' he said quietly. 'Jenkins, can you see me?'

"A sobbing voice answered from the seemingly empty chair.

" 'Y-e-e-es; but I can't see my - myself. I've gone crazy, or something. Or that fool idea of mine has made me this way. I don't know - oh, I don't know. I didn't understand at first what you fellows were talking about - I thought you had gone mad yourselves. But now I can't see my - my -"

" 'Here's my hand,' said Ridges, sweeping his hand before the chair as though he himself were blind. 'Take hold of it. There - ah, good Heavens!'

"Ridges gasped as he tightened his fingers about what was evidently Jenkins's hand. It was horribly uncanny to see Ridges' knuckles whiten about what appeared to be empty air.

" 'Now get up,' he went on.

"The cushions of the chair squeaked a bit, and the upholstery rose - that was the only sign that Jenkins had complied and left his seat. Ridges then locked his arm awkwardly about Jenkins's form apparently, and stepped towards the fire. I remember the awful look Hathaway turned upon me as we saw only Ridges moving and yet heard two muffled sets of footsteps on the rugs. I remember, too, staring fascinatedly to see if between me and the glow of the coals I could discern anything of the stricken man. But I could not - not even the slightest shadow or outline could I see.

" 'There,' said Ridges, pausing before the hearth. 'Do you feel its warmth?'

" 'Of course I do,' came a hollow cry from his side. 'But I can't see my -' The voice ended in a groan.

"Ridges's grip tightened convulsively on the unseen hand. Then all at once the arm he had hooked about Jenkins sagged as if a weight had suddenly been imposed upon it. And at the same time his face went a shade greyer and hardened anxiously.

" 'Quick! Quick!' he cried. 'The man's fainted or something. He's gone limp as a rag. Here - here, help me with him. Get him upon the table. You, Hathaway -'

"Hathaway drew back a moment, then, with his eyes suddenly filled with tears, reached down and gathered into his own arms the limbs we could not see. Then lifted - and the strained cords about his neck stood out.

" 'A cushion,' cried Ridges.

"Gilson jerked out of his trance, and snatched one from a chair. Then while Ridges lifted, placed it gingerly near his hand. Gilson exploded wrathfully in quite excusable anger.

" 'Not there, you young fool! Here, here,' and with his arm still held supportingly, he jerked the cushion nearer him, gently lowered his arm. At once a roundish depression slowly sank into the softness of it - but the head that made that hollow we could not see. 'Now water - quick!' ordered Gilson.

" 'God!' cried Gilson. 'Is - is - he only fainted?'

" 'Here!' cried Ridges. He seized Gilson's hand roughly, and held it down hard about ten inches above the table just below the cushion. "There," he said in a cold, hard voice, 'feel him breathe - his heart -'

"Gilson's hand and arm moved slowly up and down to the respiration of the unseen man upon the table - and his own breath came rather harshly.

" 'The water!' cried Ridges - Ridges always takes the lead in giving help despite his mocking and oft-times cruel sarcasm. He nodded to Lee, who had run to get that best of nature's restoratives. 'You said nothing about this to anyone?' Ridges questioned.

"The man shook his head.

" 'Not a word,' he declared.

" 'Good!' commended Ridges.

"And Gilson, his responsibility for all this resting heavily upon him, half sobbed:

" 'Thank God!' Then he cried: 'But if - if - anything - hap - happens - I - I'm here. Right here, and-'

" 'Shut up!' snapped Ridges. 'Shut up and help me give him water. Here, hold up his head. No - not there, not that way. Here -'

"He took Gilson's hands and held them, palms towards each other, about a foot apart and just above the depression of Jenkins's head in the cushion. 'Hold them so,' he ordered, then withdrew his own and moved them until they stopped above the little hollow. 'Now bring them on either side of mine - quick, man, we're wasting time. Now slowly towards each other - it wouldn't do to shock him while he's this way - we can't tell -'

"Gilson's trembling hands came to an abrupt stop.

" 'I - they've struck something - feels like hair. Yes, yes, it's his head.' His hand felt vaguely lower, and cupped. 'Ready,' he said. 'I've got Jenkins's poor head.'

" 'Hang Jenkins's poor head!' exploded Ridges. 'Lift.'

"Gilson lifted, and Ridges felt for Jenkins's mouth with his fingers, then gently tipped the glass. That was perhaps the most uncanny sight of all that awful evening. You see, P.M., he was pouring water. We could see its level dip. We could see it leave the glass - and then, you know, it - disappeared. It seemed poured into the air - one would expect to see it splash to the table top. But instead, as if it had instantaneously evaporated - it disappeared. The thought that struck me then was queer enough. I bent down and examined the table top, and saw that I was right.

"Where Jenkins's body touched the hard, polished walnut was a slight depression. With suspicion developing I put out a hand as if to assist Gilson, and saw that where my fingers touched that unseen body the tips of them, too, became invisible. It was as though an eighth of an inch of them had been by that contact clipped off.

I bent and examined Gilson's hands and saw that they, too, were in the same condition. I nudged Hathaway, and called his attention to this extraordinary appearance. He stared silently, then burst out:

" 'That is what I feared - why I was afraid. Whatever it is that makes poor Jenkins this way is probably in the nature of vibration - and Jenkins's belief could bring that on - that is what I feared we would bring him to. And each minute particle of his body is vibrating so as to be quite invisible - just like the blades of an electric fan. And that vibration is communicated to his clothing. That's why we can't see it - I've been thinking about it ever since it - it happened. And it's the same with the surface of anything his body touches - so, of course, those become invisible, too. Oh, I was afraid of this very thing occurring - Jenkins takes impressions so strongly, and believes, believes, believes - so profoundly in some of his weird ideas that he's just -'

"A startled exclamation from Ridges interrupted.

" 'He's coming back?' he whispered then.

" 'Coming back - can you see him?' shouted Gilson, though his mouth was within a foot of Ridges' ear. 'Oh, thank -'

Ridges glared.

" 'Now, everybody,' he cautioned in a deadly, quiet voice, 'when I give the word, swear by all that's holy that you can see his hand. You acted before - and got him into this. For God's sake play up now, and get him out of it. It's the only way - to work it by his own belief. Jenkins's very life may depend upon it. He's got himself into this condition because of his belief in his idiotic theory, and his acceptance of our jesting as serious fact. The only way to get him back is to make him believe just as strongly that we can see him again. Then he'll begin - but there, he's moving - he is coming back to consciousness - sh! everybody! And remember.'

"Ridges paused and stared at the unseen hand he held. Then turned fiercely upon us, and cried loudly:

"Look, look - his hand! Jenkins's hand. The fingers - see? Now the hand, the whole hand. The wrist - they're coming visible again - thank God, they're coming back!" Ridges fairly shouted now. "Look, Jenkins, you look; see for yourself. Ah, thank God, thank God, old man, you're going to be with us again!"

"As yet I myself could see nothing - and knew that Ridges did not. But I added my voice to the rest - putting into it a gladness that I did not feel, things looked so hopeless. Then Ridges's hand jerked as though the unseen hand it gripped had moved.

Then weakly came a voice we recognized as Jenkins's.

" 'I can't see -' it sobbed pathetically, and Ridges' arms moved upward as though the body they were supporting had sat up.

" 'Madman - look!' stormed Ridges. 'Look at that hand!'

"Then Jenkins again: 'Oh, but I can't, I can't -

" 'Thank God, thank God, you're coming back!' came in real sobs from Ridges, and I could feel the aching, throbbing sympathy in the cry. We gasped a similar declaration - yet stared all the time in trembling fear that the ruse might not prove as efficacious now as our boomerang practical joke had before.

" 'I can't!' cried Jenkins, half hysterical.

" 'Quick!' whispered Ridges fiercely to us. 'His pulse is horribly low. For the sake of the little man's very life, make it go!'

" 'Oh, I can't - I - I sobbed Jenkins once more.

"'But you must - *you must!*' shrieked Gilson, the joker. 'You must see it. You can't help it - we see it, we do. You *must*. Only look -'

"Jenkins's voice broke in again, a bit stronger, and with now a lurking bit of confidence and belief.

" 'You - you're sure? Sure?' I imagined him wildly looking about at us with his frightened eyes. Then, with a heart-piercing little scream: 'Why - my hand, there are the fingers - growing, growing - I can - I believe I can -'

"A great sigh came from Ridges. Ours were not far behind. Weakly we joined in with his congratulations.

"For there, as a photograph develops out of the clear paper, as frost grows upon the window-pane, as salt crystallizes out of a clear solution, there did Jenkins become visible to our sight again. First the fingertips as we made him believe. Then the hand that Ridges held. Then the good solid right arm creeping weirdly upward to the shoulder. Then, as Jenkins's full belief came back, his whole body rushed out of nothingness into the world of normal vision.

"I for one sank into a great, soothing chair, and allowed my own trembling body to quiver slowly back to peace again. I believe all must have done the same - I could hear Gilson sobbing hysterically next me with his head hidden in his arms, and his body jerking with the violence of his emotion. Ridges sat upon the table-edge with his friend half in his arms, cuddling and consoling and heartening him as does a mother her nightmare-ridden child. Hathaway, still in his chair, twiddling a new cigar about in his hands, watched Jenkins's every move, the tears trickling unheeded down his cheeks.

"A long while, hours it seemed to me, we sat thus. Once we had a horrid scare. Jenkins, in a fit of doubt, suddenly declared he was going back again, and held out a fingerless hand in proof. But by calling in a page with water we downed his doubts, for the boy, when told whom the drink was for, stepped straight up to the tremulous little biologist and held out the glass. And as Jenkins reached fearfully for it the hand flashed visible again - Jenkins had to believe then, for the lad had made no sign that he noticed anything unusual. After this we waited half an hour or

so longer, and tried a desultory conversation about Sierra fishing that was decidedly not a success.

"Then we went home - Ridges going with the still quacking Jenkins, who pleaded that he stay the night over with him."

Burns's voice stopped abruptly. Our walk had brought us down to the Campanile, and the library where my companion was due shone just a hundred paces further, its white, glistening granite contrasting gloriously with the clear California blue above, and the delicate green and gorgeous gold of the spring acacia rising along the pathways below.

Even as we paused Burns thrust out his hand as if in afterthought.

"See that hand?" he said quietly. "Notice the dried skin on the fingertips, and the shrivelled appearance of the palm. Ridges's hands looked like that, and Gilson's - so with each one of us who touched Jenkins while he was that way. Almost as if they were blistered. But they were not painful, even though that same night when I washed, a good part of the surface cuticle crumbled off. The table top where Jenkins lay was thus curiously rotted to the depth of an eighth-inch or so, too. And even the tapestry upholstery of Jenkins's chair. Not burned exactly, not really rotted, but crisped, dried, discoloured.

"Hathaway came as near hitting the cause of it as any of us when we discussed the phenomenon afterward. The vibration of Jenkins's body, communicating its almost infinitely rapid trembling to everything his body touched, crystallized skin, wood, cloth. Something like heat, perhaps; or better yet, just as the metal parts of an automobile are crystallized by the vibration of the engine and road. Ridges told us next day, too, what a time he had in getting Jenkins home in even decent condition; for the little man's own clothing crumbled and broke and was shed at every step."

We were at the library entrance now, and Burns paused once more and stared up at the gracefully stretching eucalyptus across the roadway. Then turned and his gaze covered the splendid granite pile before us. A few words he muttered then; I could make out but one or two.

"Sierran stone - solid - solid - and like Jenkins -" Came some words I could not get. Then with a curious shrug of his shoulders:

"Who can tell - who can tell -"

Abruptly he swung to me again.

"That," he said, "explains Lemuel Jenkins's eyes - and the almost holy joy in them when he knew that we could see him. He lives in continual fear, you know, that his doubts will run away with him once more, and he - and the same thing happen another time. Has an utter horror of it - but is getting better, thank God, better every day. By the way" - Burns turned with one foot on the step - "Jenkins will remember you. Next time you see him, for the sake of his very soul, go straight up and hold out your hand, and smile your pleasure at seeing him right into his eyes. Don't forget, P.M., don't forget."

I gripped his hand with sympathy, and nodded. After seeing Jenkins's eyes as had I that morning - how could I forget? How could I?

THE RAG THING

by David Grinnell

The origin of all life we are told is slime-the slime of the molten earth, when dampness and heat and chemical combined to mix a witch's brew. In a few terse words, in a setting as unimaginative as a drab house on a drab street, David Grinnell speaks of the repetition of this phenomenon. Beware, then, of damp, dark, dirty, warm places!

IT would have been all right if Spring had never come. During the winter nothing had happened and nothing was likely to happen as long as the weather remained cold and Mrs. Larch kept the radiators going. In a way, though, it is quite possible to hold Mrs. Larch to blame for everything that happened. Not that she had what people would call malicious intentions, but just that she was two things practically every boarding-house landlady is - thrifty and not too clean.

She shouldn't have been in such a hurry to turn the heat off so early in March. March is a tricky month and she should have known that the first warm day is usually an isolated phenomenon. But then you could always claim that she shouldn't have been so sloppy in her cleaning last November. She shouldn't have dropped that rag behind the radiator in the third floor front room.

As a matter of fact, one could well wonder what she was doing using such a rag anyway. Polishing furniture doesn't require a clean rag to start with, certainly not the rag you stick into the furniture polish, that's going to be greasy anyway - but she didn't have to use that particular rag. The one that had so much dried blood on it from the meat that had been lying on it in the kitchen.

On top of that, it is probable that she had spit into the filthy thing, too. Mrs. Larch was no prize package. Gross, dull, unkempt, widowed and careless, she fitted into the house - one of innumerable other brownstone fronts in the lower sixties of New York. Houses that in former days, fifty or sixty years ago, were considered the height of fashion and the residences of the well-to-do, now reduced to dingy rooming places for all manner of itinerants, lonely people with no hope in life other than dreary jobs, or an occasional young and confused person from the hinterland seeking fame and fortune in a city which rarely grants it.

So it was not particularly odd that when she accidentally dropped the filthy old rag behind the radiator in the room on the third floor front late in November, she had simply left it there and forgotten to pick it up.

It gathered dust all winter, unnoticed. Skelty, who had the room, might have cleaned it out himself save that he was always too tired for that. He worked at some indefinite factory all day and when he came home he was always too tired to do much more than read the sports and comic pages of the newspapers and then maybe stare at the streaky brown walls a bit before dragging himself into bed to sleep the dreamless sleep of the weary.

The radiator, a steam one oddly enough (for most of these houses used the older hot-air circulation), was in none too good condition. Installed many many years ago by the house's last Victorian owner, it was given to knocks, leaks, and cantankerous action. Along in December it developed a slow drip, and drops of hot water would fall to seep slowly into the floor and leave the rag lying on a moist hot surface. Steam was constantly escaping from a bad valve that Mrs. Larch would have repaired if it had blown off completely but, because the radiator always managed to be hot, never did.

Because Mrs. Larch feared draughts, the windows were rarely open in the winter and the room would become oppressively hot at times when Skelty was away.

It is hard to say what is the cause of chemical reactions. Some hold that all things are mechanical in nature, others that life has a psychic side which cannot be duplicated in laboratories. The problem is one for metaphysicians; everyone knows that some chemicals are attracted to heat, others to light, and they may not necessarily be alive at all. Tropisms is the scientific term used, and if you want to believe that living matter is stuff with a great number of tropisms and dead matter is stuff with little or no tropisms, that's one way of looking at it. Heat and moisture and greasy chemical compounds were the sole ingredients of the birth of life in some ancient unremembered swamp.

Which is why it probably would have been all right if Spring had never come. Because Mrs. Larch turned the radiators off one day early in March. The warm hours were but few. It grew cold with the darkness and by night it was back in the chill of February again. But Mrs. Larch had turned the heat off and, being lazy, decided not to turn it on again till the next morning, provided of course that it stayed cold next day (which it did).

Anyway Skelty was found dead in bed the next morning. Mrs. Larch knocked on his door when he failed to come down to breakfast and when he hadn't answered, she turned the knob and went in. He was lying in bed, blue and cold, and he had been smothered in his sleep.

There was quite a to-do about the whole business but nothing came of it. A few stupid detectives blundered around the room, asked silly questions, made a few notes, and then left the matter to the coroner and the morgue. Skelty was a nobody, no one cared whether he lived or died, he had no enemies and no friends, there were no suspicious visitors, and he had probably smothered accidentally in the blankets. Of course the body was unusually cold when Mrs. Larch found it, as if the heat had been sucked out of him, but who notices a thing like that? They also discounted the grease smudge on the top sheet, the grease stains on the floor, and the slime on his face. Probably some grease he might have been using for some imagined skin trouble, though Mrs. Larch had not heard of his doing so. In any case, no one really cared.

Mrs. Larch wore black for a day and then advertised in the papers. She made a perfunctory job of cleaning the room. Skelty's possessions were taken away by a drab sister-in-law from Brooklyn who didn't seem to care much either, and Mrs. Larch was all ready to rent the room to someone else.

The weather remained cold for the next ten days and the heat was kept up in the pipes.

The new occupant of the room was a nervous young man from up-state who was trying to get a job in New York. He was a high-strung young man who entertained any number of illusions about life and society. He thought that people did things for the love of it and he wanted to find a job where he could work for that motivation rather than the sort of things he might have done back home. He thought New York was different, which was a mistake.

He smoked like fury which was something Mrs. Larch did not like because it meant ashes on the floor and burned spots on her furniture (not that there weren't plenty already), but there was nothing Mrs. Larch would do about it because it would have meant exertion.

After four days in New York, this young man, Gorman by name, was more nervous than ever. He would lie in bed nights smoking cigarette after cigarette, thinking and thinking and getting nowhere. Over and over he was facing the problem of resigning himself to a life of grey drab. It was a thought he had tried not to face and now that it was thrusting itself upon him, it was becoming intolerable.

The next time a warm day came, Mrs. Larch left the radiators on because she was not going to be fooled twice. As a result, when the weather stayed warm, the rooms became insufferably hot because she was still keeping the windows down. So that when she turned the heat off finally, the afternoon of the second day, it was pretty tropic in the rooms.

When the March weather turned about suddenly again and became chilly about nine at night, Mrs. Larch was going to bed and figured that no one would complain and that it would be warm again the next day. Which may or may not be true, it does not matter.

Gorman got home about ten, opened the window, got undressed, moved a pack of cigarettes and ash tray next to his bed on the floor, got into bed, turned out the light and started to smoke.

He stared at the ceiling, blowing smoke upwards into the darkened room trying to see its outlines in the dim light coming in from the street. When he finished one cigarette, he let his hand dangle out the side of the bed and picked up another cigarette from the pack on the floor, lit it from the butt in his mouth, and dropped the butt into the ash tray on the floor.

The rag under the radiator was getting cold, the room was getting cold, there was one source of heat radiation in the room. That was the man in the bed. Skelty had proven a source of heat supply once. Heat attraction was chemical force that could not be denied. Strange forces began to accumulate in the long-transformed fibres of the rag.

Gorman thought he heard something flap in the room but he paid no attention. Things were always creaking in the house. Gorman heard a swishing noise and ascribed it to the mice.

Gorman reached down for a cigarette, fumbled for it, found the pack, deftly extracted a smoke in the one-handed manner chain smokers become accustomed to, lifted it to his mouth, lit it from the burning butt in his mouth, and reached down with the butt to crush it out against the tray.

He pressed the butt into something wet like a used handkerchief, there was a sudden hiss, something coiled and whipped about his wrist; Gorman gasped and drew his hand back fast. A flaming horror, twisting and writhing, was curled around it. Before Gorman could shriek, it had whipped itself from his hand and fastened over his face, over the warm, heat-radiating skin and the glowing flame of the cigarette.

Mrs. Larch was awakened by the clang of fire engines. When the fire was put out, most of the third floor had been gutted. Gorman was an unrecognizable charred mass.

The fire department put the blaze down to Gorman's habit of smoking in bed. Mrs. Larch collected on the fire insurance and bought a new house, selling the old one to a widow who wanted to start a boarding house.