

*The past one hundred years have seen more scientific progress than the preceding ten thousand years. Specialization has become necessary, since no one man can any longer absorb complete knowledge of his subject. A point is already being reached where the elements of each new advance have become so complex that it is difficult for us to visualize all the factors that go into future developments. Human beings seem to be moving toward a condition where they will not be able to comprehend or understand new phenomenon before them, even though their science and mathematics may prove their existence. Harry Bates, sensitively perceiving such an eventually impending situation, has written a human and moving story on a theme calculated to make you think.*

*(Illustrations by Virgil Finlay)*

## I

WE ALL KNOW now it was something new that happened two weeks ago in that lonely field out on Long Island. Some of us are frightened. A great many of us are shaken and bewildered. And why shouldn't we be? The four dimensions of space-time have betrayed us. They were unstable all the time, and now the impossible has occurred.

Extra dimensions have long been abstract concepts used by mathematicians, but what a shock to find they may have reality! What a shock to learn that the symbols can strike and kill! And kill so fantastically!

Never has there been such hush-hush. Earth's top scientists swarm over the fatal area, and we're told nothing. I say we. I am an electrical engineer at the Wilson Laboratories where it happened; I've been employed there since my graduation in February and I still draw my salary; I was sole witness of the first wonder and the major witness of the third—but they don't even let me on the premises. Having given my facts, I haven't any present use. I'd only be under their feet. So—while I know the general setup at the field, and know a good deal about the lightning experiments which were performed there, I know no more than you of the dimensional experiments now going on.

Nor do I know any more than you the explanation of what happened.

I do know, and I alone know, the complete story of the impact of the New Thing *on one human being*, and I am telling that story here.

You've read the names of the victims. Mary Sellers I knew since childhood. I grew up with her husband Tom, and was his best friend. I was right on the field with them at the moment of Mary's fantastic death, when the Unknown first struck.

It was about nine-twenty in the evening, and very still and lonely. A full moon showed clearly all the larger details of the area. Several hundred yards to the west, in the direction of New York City, lay the cluster of buildings that comprised the indoor part of the Wilson Laboratories. Between lay the field used in the outdoor experiments—a rectangular area of about 80 acres, once field land, now a level surface of weeds irregularly furrowed with deep trenches. In a great oval stood a half-dozen high latticed towers, and in the center of them two greater towers—the area of mystery. I may not give any further details. The field was circled by a high woven-wire fence posted at intervals with out-facing signs warning: KEEP OUT. LIGHTNING EXPERIMENTS. DANGEROUS.

When it happened I was standing on the lip of a trench in the eastern end of the field. Below me in the trench ran a new, experimental type of electrical conductor. Thirty yards farther away two electricians were at work in the trench farthest east, the tips of their heads sometimes just visible above the lip. These men were making alterations at the conductor in that trench.

Tom and Mary were standing in the field twenty yards or so from the men in the trench, and between them and me. They were talking in low tones. I couldn't hear their words, but from their manner I had the

impression there was a stress between them; not quite a quarrel, but a difference. I saw Tom turn away, Mary circled him in the moonlight as if insisting on looking into his face; he kept turning away. Then, after a moment, she left him.

She walked straight westward across the field to the next trench, turned and for a moment looked back at him, crossed the trench where it was bridged by heavy planks, turned again momentarily toward him, then continued on the footpath across the wide level beyond. Tom stood watching her dwindling figure. When Mary reached a place between the two central towers she turned once more, for the last time. She raised her arm high and waved. I saw her clearly. Tom remained motionless, only looking. She dropped her arm. For just a second the two stood thus, one terrible second, while space-time coiled about Mary to strike that initial blow so unexpected and so fantastic ...

I HAD BETTER tell you certain things about Tom and Mary. The three of us grew up together in the little Long Island town of Big Pond, two miles east of the Wilson Laboratories.

Tom and I, as boys, were inseparable. His father had a duck farm on the edge of town. The farm was our inexhaustible playground. Every day saw us engaged in some new enterprise of burning importance—making bows and arrows for shooting starlings (I don't remember that we ever hit one)—digging for Indian skeletons (which we insisted were *not* sheep bones)—building board boats for venturing out among the great flotillas of ducks—and other activities, many others. Mary lived nearby, but she was no pal of ours in those days. As that peculiar creature called a girl, different, inferior, a sissy, we found her of use only for the occasional amusement of pigtail jerking. The mere threat of that kept her well away from our arenas of proper masculine action.

When Tom was about eight his father gave him a horse. He at once named it Pinto and always called it a "him." (Pinto was no *pinto* at all, but a red roan, an ordinary farm horse, and a mare at that.) From the moment Tom first climbed to her back via the fence, it was no longer Tom and me who were inseparable, but Tom and Pinto; the two ranged all over that end of the Island. Tom wouldn't let any of us other kids ride his horse, for he'd say we didn't have the experience—Pinto being a wild mustang, dangerous to everyone except himself.

Only once did I ride Pinto. I had had an everlasting fist fight with Tom. He was in the wrong, but impetuous as always he had come at me, fists flailing. That evening Tom's father explained things and sent Tom to ask my pardon. He did it forthrightly, crying while he spoke—and the next day he came galloping to my house and insisted that I take a ride on Pinto, to make amends. It was his utmost gesture.

The adolescent Tom was too restless to be good at book learning, and after high school he became an apprentice electrician, later getting a job at Wilson's. I continued through college, graduated as an electrical engineer, and became employed by Wilson's. While I was still in school Tom's father lost his farm, then died, so Tom went to live in the town. He stabled old Pinto in the garage of an empty house at one end of town and pastured her in a piece of land in back. He walked to and from work, or got lifts.

Then, one day, Tom looked at Mary and saw her in a new way. She had somehow become a different Mary—someone new, withdrawn, mysterious, with sudden power to make his heart beat wildly. He courted her in his usual impetuous way. They married and rented the little house in the garage of which Pinto was stabled. Crazy happy, he carried the new Mary over the threshold of the little house into a new life. That was a year ago. There came a time they expected a child—and I have never seen a man so happy and proud.

AT WILSON'S a new series of experiments were beginning, and on the fatal night Tom was working overtime in the field. I was in the main building when the watchman phoned, saying Mary was there. I found she had ridden over on Pinto with coffee for Tom. She was in a wonderful mood! She glowed with happiness. I myself took her to him. From a distance she called to Tom, and I saw him appear above the trench and come toward us. I hung back, thinking to be tactful.

From a short distance I stood and watched them. They embraced and spoke. I felt there was a stress between them. I saw her kiss him on the back of his neck when his head was turned. He wheeled and spoke to her sharply. She seemed to accept defeat and left him, making for the footpath across the field,

and turning twice to look back. Between the high central towers she turned for the last time and waved, but Tom did not respond. She lowered her arm, and for a second stood motionless in the moonlight, looking at him. It was at the end of that second that the New Thing happened and Tom's life was blasted.

*From the place where Mary stood there sounded a slight c-r-a-c-k, and a foglike cloud appeared in the air. It dissipated quickly, but the body of Mary was no longer there.*

Tom and I from our separate positions stared.

An ambiguous mass hung where the body of Mary had been; very slowly it seemed to grow. I watched it in consternation. I saw it as roundish; it seemed to rotate, for the reflections from its surface changed in the moonlight. I found myself moving toward it, and Tom was doing the same, and we came nearer. I felt that Tom, like myself, was terribly excited, but neither of us said anything; we only stared and moved forward.

The object steadily grew larger, and I realized it was traveling in our direction. I reached out and grasped Tom's arm, stopping him, and together we watched it approach.

Suddenly we recognized it. I'm sure my hair stood on end. Stiff, dumbfounded, we watched the object come. It was a head with an indistinct vapor-like body!

My eyes told me the object was Mary's outline! *It* was alone and unattached. It didn't fall. It floated toward us, eight or ten feet from the ground. The head looked solid and substantial. It came on slowly, sometimes wafting a foot or so higher, sometimes that much lower. It reached us. It passed us. As I turned I saw that Tom stood bent, knees and body. Never could there have been a man so stricken. Still he did not speak; but he was making noises in his throat.

As the object passed us it was rotating a little and the moonlight fell full on the face. It was Mary's face. Just as it always was, except that now it was blank, without expression. But it was somehow alive! At that moment the eyes, which had been closed, opened! I think they may have changed direction, but they didn't look at us. They seemed unaware of us. The face was tilted upward, and the eyes pointed at the stars.

With a terrible sob Tom moved forward. Never changing speed or direction, the object floated away. We followed it. Tom was panting now, but he still said nothing. We were only a few yards behind when it reached the east fence.

It passed *through* the fence, never pausing, but idly floating straight ahead.

We jumped and for a moment stood grasping the wire, watching it move away; then Tom with an explosion of energy swarmed up over the fence, dropped, and started to overtake it. Slowly and with difficulty I too climbed the fence, but I slipped as I was preparing for the drop, and I hit the ground hard with chest and cheek, and was knocked unconscious.

I don't know how long I lay there. When I pulled dizzily to my feet and looked about, there was no sign of Tom. Back in the field I saw the two other men working in the trench as before, so I knew they had not seen what had happened. I thought I'd better find Tom, and struck out in the direction he had been headed, crossing the side road there and edging through the barbed-wire fence of the field on the other side.

With mounting anxiety I ran across the field to the small wood on the far side. I hurried back and forth among the trees, calling and searching, but there was no sign of him.

Beyond the wood I continued in the same direction, as far as I could judge it, climbing fences, crossing fields, passing the edge of the grounds of Pemberton General Hospital and bearing straight toward Big Pond, where Tom and I lived. I ran, when breath permitted, making wide detours to examine dim objects in the fields, and hurrying always. In this way I covered the whole two miles to the town, but found no trace of him.

At the town I made a real stop for the first time. As my breath came back my wits did, too. I realized I had witnessed an event fantastic beyond credibility. How could I tell anyone what I had seen? I'd not be believed. People would only think me crazy. I decided to keep mum until I'd found Tom.

I set in motion again, inquiring for Tom of people on the streets, but no one had seen him.

I went to his home then, full of a sudden foolish hope that I'd find Mary there, and perhaps Tom; but

the house was dark and no one answered my knock. I entered and looked about. A tiny kitten came rubbing and squeaking against my ankles.

I phoned Wilson's. The watchman supposed Torn was still back in the field—and yes, the horse was still tied to a tree in front. He'd not seen Mary leave the field, either, nor me. When he started to ask questions I hung up.

I suppose I'd still been hoping that what I'd seen had somehow not happened; but the watchman killed that hope.

I was greatly worried about Tom and how his fantastic pursuit may have ended. I decided to stay right there until he returned. He'd certainly come home. After we'd compared notes, we'd report together what had happened. I cleaned the bruise on my cheekbone, then settled down to wait. I was very tired. A long time passed, and I fell asleep.

## II

WHEN I AWOKE it was daylight, and the kitten, a tiny puff of fur, was sitting on my chest looking cryptically into my face. At once I phoned Wilson's. Tom had not reported back from the field and the other two men had gone home wondering. The horse was still there. I told them nothing.

I'd hardly hung up when the phone rang. It was the Pemberton General Hospital. They wanted to speak to Mrs. Sellers. When I said she wasn't there and told who I was they asked me to come to the hospital. Tom was there and wanted to speak to me.

I hurried home, backed out my car and drove over.

I found Tom in a small room, alone, strapped on a cot. His forehead was covered by a patch of white bandage, and over the patch lay his ever-unruly lock of red hair. At once, with a wild surge of hope and fear, he asked:

"Jack, *you* saw it?"

He was hoping the thing hadn't occurred.

"It happened," I said. "I've been waiting for you to come home. Why are you here?"

Before he could answer a nurse entered and asked who I was. She told me Torn was picked up near State Park; he was lying in the road, bruised and delirious.

"You've got him strapped down!" I said accusingly.

"He's been violent. He kept trying to get away. It was only a little while ago he told who he was and asked us to phone his wife. He also wanted to reach you."

Tom said, "Make them take off these straps, Jack."

"Take them off," I urged the nurse. "You can see he's all right now. He's had a bad shock, that's all. I know all about it. I was there."

The nurse left to consult the doctor in charge. Tom at once turned a tortured face to me.

"It was her—head?" he asked, still doubting his memory.

"Yes."

"She hasn't been home?" he asked, still hoping, or perhaps confused.

"No. And Pinto's still tied outside the Lab." "Then it's so," he said. "It's really so."

"What became of the—her head?" I asked.

"Gone! Gone! Sunk! Jack, what happened?"

"I don't know. It's something new. Something that's never happened before."

Tom's expression was pitiful. He cried, "It was just her head! Where was her body?"

"I don't know. It disappeared. There was just that crack, and the smoke, and then—nothing else." His eyes filled with tears.

"Where *is* she?" he cried in anguish.

I heard footsteps and barely had time to say, "Don't tell them anything!" when the nurse entered with a doctor.

That started an argument. Tom demanded his clothes so he could sign himself out; the doctor explained that his physical condition was uncertain and he should remain until the next day. It was finally

agreed that he could leave that evening, if he seemed all right at that time. The doctor told the nurse she could remove the straps.

"I'll be back for you after supper," I promised Tom. "Try to get some sleep."

With haunted eyes Tom watched me leave. But he remembered Pinto, and called out to me to take her home and feed her.

I know nothing about horses, so I drove back to Big Pond, picked up a handyman I knew there, and drove him to Wilson's to do it for me.

Then, since I was right at the Lab and had an obligation to report, I decided to tell the whole story to Dr. William Chambers, the director and head. I took the flight of stairs to his offices and asked to see him. Mr. Merriam, the superintendent, took me in.

Dr. Chambers is a tall, lean, friendly man, talkative and always approachable, so I boldly told him what had happened. But he didn't believe me. He only sat there and looked at me. He didn't even say anything, and neither did Mr. Merriam. I pointed to corroborative details—Mary's not going home on Pinto, Tom's disappearance from the field and his presence in the hospital—and he only looked at me oddly. I became excited and raised my voice, and that didn't help any. Of course I had that raw bruise, I wasn't shaved, and my story certainly was wild. I left him rather abruptly, before he should tell me I was fired, or maybe try to have me held for observation:

I couldn't blame him.

BEFORE I LEFT the premises I went out into the field and made a hurried search for some sign of Mary's body, or some indication of what happened, but I found nothing. I drove home then, ate, undressed, bathed, shaved, and lay down; but I couldn't sleep.

After supper I drove back to the hospital. It was dark before Tom and I got away. In the hospital I'd seen him keep up some appearance of normality, but as soon as he was in the car he slumped back, the hurt man he was. I told him about my seeing Dr. Chambers, and how I'd searched the field. I was very curious about what had become of the head, but I couldn't get him to talk. He sat sealed in bitterness, and appeared not even to hear what I said.

When we arrived at his home he just sat in the car and turned his head away.

"We're here," I announced. After a moment, haltingly, he said:

"You go in first and . . . and . . . see if she's there."

It was pathetic. I went in and looked through every room, the kitten following me, squeaking. Mary's things lay here and there about the house, especially in the bedroom, but Mary wasn't there, of course, and never would be again. I went out and told him. He sighed.

"I'm afraid to go in," he confessed. "Would you mind if I stayed at your place tonight?"

I said I'd be glad to have him; I didn't want to leave him alone in that silent house.

"There's a little kitten," he said; "it must be hungry. Will you go in and feed it? There'll be something in the refrigerator. I'll go tend to Pinto."

He got out of the car and went around back. I went in and fed the kitten. It was extremely hungry. When Tom came I drove over to my home.

My father was there, but we bypassed him and fixed some drinks in the kitchen. After we'd brought them to the living room we told him what had happened.

At first he too was incredulous. When he began to believe, he was so affected that for a moment he stuttered.

"What happened?" Tom asked him eagerly.

Dad's a mechanical engineer, but of course he didn't know.

"It was mostly the head!" Tom cried. "It didn't fall, it floated. It floated eastward in a straight line, right through the fence, right across the road and field and the trees on the other side and through everything it met. It went right across our old farm. It went lower at the pond, and passed a little above the surface. I got around the pond in time to find it on the other side. It went on and on. But when it came to the lake this side of State Park it just skimmed the surface, and I think it sank under, because I didn't see it any more. How can that be?"

Of course we had nothing to answer.

"It seems to me it was lighter, I mean thinner, a little transparent, toward the end. As if it were dissolving. And there was something more. I thought I began to see the outline of Mary's body with the head. Just a hint of it. But I'm not sure. It was way out over the water."

We sat for a moment, wondering about this.

"One thing is clear," I pointed out to my father: "The object didn't obey gravity. I guess I ought to say it *seemed* not to obey gravity, because nothing can be independent of it. The object didn't fall. So it may have something to do with other dimensions. Something special to do with space, time, matter, electricity, gravity. I don't know how to put it in words, properly. We know there are extra dimensions in mathematics, but they're just concepts, abstractions; useful in calculations, but without a corresponding reality. Of course there've been theories and stories which dealt with the material reality of other dimensional states. Could this be the clue?"

Dad thought it over. "It seems more likely than anything else—though to say that doesn't explain anything," he answered. "I don't know any more about such things than you. You'd have to talk to a theoretical physicist."

"Herzog!" I exclaimed. "He'd know, wouldn't he? All that publicity given to his Comprehensive Field Theory. That includes gravity."

"His theory is only a theory," Dad said. "Furthermore, it's known to be imperfect. It has a flaw. It's a magnificent thing, a big step forward; it neatly reconciles previous inconsistencies; but physicists say there's one phenomenon that doesn't jibe with it. They call it the *Exception*. They say Herzog is working to account for the inconsistency—he and the other top theoretical physicists in the world."

"Do you think he might be able to explain what happened?" Tom asked.

"It's very doubtful," said my father. He got up and took a thin pamphlet from the bookcase. "Here's his Field Theory. Twenty-one pages, almost all of it symbols and equations. All condensed at the end into four short equations. And maybe contains an error. They're not even sure." He opened the pamphlet at random, shrugged, and handed it to Tom. Tom looked helplessly in it here and there.

"Thousands like that were sold, and almost all are mere souvenirs. In the entire world there's only a handful of men who can understand what he's done there. Only the specialists, the top scientific brains. To the public—you—me—the book's only a bit of *curiosa*, something to strike awe, proof that the world is wonderful and that genius exists."

There was a silence, while Tom thumbed through the few pages. "Then the secret lies in this," he said hopelessly.

"Perhaps."

"And hardly anybody can understand it."

"Hardly anybody."

"Space and time and matter and electricity and gravity . . . I'm an electrician and I use only a dozen symbols and equations. Here there's a bookful. And somewhere in them it explains where Mary is. Or what happened to her."

Tom sobbed and tossed the book to the other end of the sofa. After a moment he reached for it and leafed through it again. He said:

"Where does Herzog live?"

"Somewhere in the city."

"He could tell me . . . Do you think Dr. Chambers at Wilson's understands this?"

"Possibly," Dad answered. "He's a very big man." "Don't look for any help from him," I warned Tom. "I told you how he didn't believe me this morning."

Conversation stalled. I saw tears in Tom's eyes. Suddenly he blurted:

"If Mary'd just died, that wouldn't have been so bad. Oh, it would be bad, but it wouldn't be like this! Is she dead? I mean dead like other people who die. Can you tell me that?"

"Of course she's dead," I said. "Even if her head and body exist somewhere, they may be separate. That could happen in an ordinary explosion: part of the body can disappear, the rest is found. If they're together—if you really did see her body at the end—they would have to be in a different condition, a

different state of matter."

"Why didn't this ever happen to anybody before?" "Perhaps the required conditions never existed before," Dad said. "There's never been a setup like the one at Wilson's. Think of it—artificial lightning—outdoors—the great scale. The high towers, the Van de Graaff generators, the tremendous capacitors, the big field laced with trenches containing carriers, some of new types under test—all this, unique. The carriers may have been transmitting currents at highly critical values—not necessarily large, but critical—and what happened may have been the result of a step function. At one set of values everything's as usual. Add one ampere somewhere and there's a sharp change, a new phenomenon. Something like that."

This made sense to me, but it hardly helped Tom that evening. Again and again he exclaimed, "If she could only just have died! So she could have been buried. Like other people. Her complete body."

There was no way to comfort him. Eventually we went to bed. I put Tom in the spare room and stayed until he had undressed and lay down. In my own room, worn out, I quickly fell asleep.

### III

I DIDN'T sleep long. I dreamed that I heard someone downstairs phoning, then, some time after that, I woke to a noise in the room. When I switched on the light, there stood Tom, fully dressed. He said: "I've found out where Herzog lives. I'm going to go ask him."

"For heaven's sake go back to bed," I cried, coming awake.

"He's the only one who can explain what happened."

"I don't believe he can explain it," I retorted. "And if he could, he wouldn't. Do you think you can go barging in on *him* in the middle of the night? Go back to bed. We'll see what we can do tomorrow."

"I can't wait, Jack—I can't stand it!" he exclaimed. "I want you to come with me. If you won't, I'll go alone."

Impetuous, stubborn—that was Tom all over. I couldn't dissuade him. More than a little angry, I got up and dressed. I decided that my part in the excursion would be to try and keep him out of jail.

Tom pushed the car from the garage to the street, so we wouldn't wake Dad, and gradually as I drove toward the city my anger left me. I tried to talk Tom into returning, but it was a waste of breath. We crossed the Triboro Bridge and passed across town. It was a little after two o'clock when we stopped in front of the address—a narrow four-story private house on the western edge of Washington Heights overlooking the Hudson.

The neighborhood was lonely and deserted. Few lights showed in the blocks of apartment buildings toward the east, none showed in Herzog's house. I felt like a criminal, to be invading the midnight privacy of the great man on Tom's irrational quest. I made one last attempt to dissuade him.

"We just can't do this, Tom! Whoever'd come to the door would be sore as hell. They wouldn't wake him; they'd just have us arrested!"

But stubbornly Tom said, "Herzog's up. He works all night, everybody knows that."

I temporized. "Then let's see first if there's a light in the back of the house. If there's no light we go back."

I got him to promise. We left the car and found a way to a rear court through a service passageway in the adjoining building. Above us, in the top floor of Herzog's house, were two lighted windows. I groaned. Without a word Tom led me back to the front of the house and pushed the door button.

We heard the buzz, and waited. There was no response. Tom rang again, longer, then rang several more times, but no one came.

"Well, that's that," I whispered with relief. "He's working and no one's going to answer."

Tom tried the knob and pushed. The door opened. He whispered, "We'll go to him," and entered, and after hesitating a moment I followed, stifling my protests.

Not a sound reached us in the narrow hallway; everyone seemed asleep. A night light at the second-floor landing lit faintly the carpeted stairs. On tiptoe we went up. Twice more dim landing lights showed the way, and we found ourselves on the top floor.

Ahead was a partly opened door, and sharply through it came light from the room we'd seen from the courtyard in back. Tom tiptoed to it, I following. We looked into a large room shelved with books. To the left were a writing desk and chair. At the far end, between the two rear windows, was a large flat table, and seated on the other side of it, reading, was the man we had come to see.

I stared at him. This was Herzog, greatest of theoretical physicists. This the famous head and face, different, pictured thousands of times in the newspapers of the world. As in the pictures, both head and face were covered by an even mat of cinnamon-colored bristles half an inch or so long. The eyebrows were other bristles to match. The all-over fur made his head seem even larger than it was, and it hid completely the expression of his face. Set in the middle was a pair of old-fashioned pinch-nose glasses.

I said Herzog was reading, but more exactly he was comparing. To his left, on the table, held open by his left hand in an upright position, rested a large book; directly in front stood another, held similarly by his right hand; and to his right, flat on the table, lay a third, a pamphlet. The glasses in the center of the spherical mat would point for a little at one book, then turn and point at another, then point perhaps at the third; he was reading back and forth among the books, changing irregularly. We stood almost in the doorway, but he seemed oblivious of us.

After a moment Tom stepped quietly inside, and I followed. Herzog didn't pause in what he was doing.

I was hot with embarrassment; I'm sure Tom was too, but he hesitated to interrupt.

We stood there perhaps half a minute, though it seemed much longer; then, with the briefest of glances at us, Herzog said quietly, "Go away," and at once was back at his work.

We stood there like a couple of idiots, paralyzed. I was more than ever determined to let Tom be the criminal. Another moment passed.

"Go away," Herzog said a second time, again with the brief glance. He was so quickly back at his comparing that we were put further off balance. Yes, like idiots we stood there, but we were so surprised! There was this unique man, working at supremely high level through the night, while for miles around him, horizontal, the millions of the great city slept—and there were we, strangers, illegal enterers, who'd crept up through the silent house to this room—intruders of unknown intention, cranks or dangerous men, for all he knew—and he showed no alarm, not even concern, but had merely noted peripherally our two presences and twice lifted his eyes for a flash and said, "Go away." What kind of concentration, or poise, or fearlessness, was this?

At last Tom cleared his throat and spoke. "Mr. Herzog."

For a moment the comparing continued, then the physicist looked up.

"Will you go away," he said, and this time there was irritation in his voice.

"Please, Mr. Herzog," said Tom, "—it's very important—we've come—I think you'll be interested—" He stopped, rattled, embarrassed by his bad start.

"Well?"

"Something happened. Out at Wilson's Laboratory on Long Island. To my wife. You're the only one who can explain it. She was standing in the middle of the field and she disappeared! All but her head and a faint outline of her body! It went floating away! I followed it for miles. It was last night. We think it might be something about the other dimensions. Yes, and gravity, because the head didn't fall; it floated. It floated along and I followed it. It went right through the fence! I know it sounds crazy, but it did really."

I came to Tom's aid. "I saw it too. It was just as he says. We both work there: I'm an engineer and he's an electrician. I told Doctor Chambers, head of the Lab, but he didn't believe me, so we've come to you as the only person who might explain it."

I stopped. For a moment there was silence while Herzog looked at us—me and my nasty bruise, Tom and his bandaged forehead. Then the mat of hair parted at his lips and he said, "Go away."

At this Tom stepped forward.



"It's really so!" he cried excitedly. "We're not crazy, and it wasn't an illusion; she disappeared, and her head floated away. She was my wife. Jack here saw it too!" He paused a moment, got a grip on himself, then retold the whole story, starting at the beginning and telling it rather well. Herzog listened without moving anything but his eyes; he didn't even lower the two books he was supporting. When he'd finished Tom held out something. It was the pamphlet—my father's copy of Herzog's Theory; I hadn't known he'd brought it.

"The explanation's in this," Tom said; "it's your book, your Comprehensive Field Theory. I can't understand it, hardly anybody can, but you can, because you wrote it. The head didn't fall—and your book includes gravity. You understand about such things. I've no one else to go to." He paused, while Herzog only looked at him. "Oh, don't you believe me?"

"I believe very little," Herzog said levelly. "I think in terms of probability. I find what you tell me extremely improbable. I might give it a probability of one in a million. If I could give it a probability of even one in ten, I would be interested. So would Doctor Chambers. Now I've heard your story. Unless you've something to add to it, I must ask you to go away."

I could see Tom desperately grasping for a way to continue the interview. He said:

"Then *make believe* we're telling the truth. If it were as we say, *if* it were, how would you explain it? I guess nothing can be done—you can't bring my wife back—but if I only knew what happened to her! Is she dead like other people? What about her head? And why did I maybe see her body at the end? If you could just help me to understand!"

At that Herzog let drop the two books he had been holding tilted. He pinched off his glasses.

"Understand?" he cried with apparent irritation. "What is that? How can we understand anything? People are born and die: do you understand that? I don't. Some men lie and cheat and kill, others lie and cheat very little, and don't kill at all: do you understand that? I don't. A mouse finds a piece of cheese and eats it: do you understand that? I don't. I hold out a book and let go, and it drops to the floor. You think I *understand* it? I don't understand it at all."

With the last words he picked up the two books, and immediately was back at work. In one second he had dismissed us with a finality as sudden and complete as an explosion.

Mumbling thanks and apologies we backed out of the room. I found myself in the car without memory of how I got there.

#### IV

AS WE PASSED back across town Tom sat hunched in the seat beside me, his head lowered, a stricken man. He muttered, "Even *he* doesn't understand. No one understands. No one in the world."

He brooded. As we crossed the Triboro Bridge he cried out suddenly, "It's not fair she should go just then!"

At that moment I didn't know what he meant. I went through the motions of trying to comfort him, and my words exposed a deeper hurt.

"She shouldn't have gone exactly then," he said. "It wasn't fair. It caught me. Things weren't right between us. And now it can never be fixed."

I kept asking him what he meant. Eventually he let go a little.

"Something happened between us there in the field. I got sore. She waved to me—and I didn't wave back! And then she was gone, and now I can never do anything about it, never."

In one of the recurrent flashes of light I saw there were tears on his cheeks.

"It couldn't have amounted to anything," I ventured. "She wasn't sore at you. I remember when she came she seemed wonderfully cheerful and happy."

"That was the cause of it!" he exclaimed. "I'd never seen her so affectionate near other people. She brought me a thermos of coffee, she didn't have to; I was through at twelve; but she just wanted to see me. Not for anything special, just wanted to see me. She didn't want to wait even three hours. She came on Pinto. She was a little afraid of Pinto, you know; but she couldn't wait three hours, and came riding Pinto, at night, bringing me coffee and just wanting to be with me a moment.

"I heard her voice. She came running ahead and I went to meet her. We kissed. I told her she needn't have come; but she said, 'I just *wanted* to come.' We sort of stood holding each other, but I was uncomfortable, because I felt the other fellows might be looking, and I didn't want them to see us so affectionate. I'm funny that way; I never could show any soft stuff in front of other people. And especially those guys; Jerry'd kid me for a month. Mary knew all that, but that night she just didn't care. When I wasn't expecting it she kissed me on the neck. I got sore. God forgive me, I got sore! I didn't want the other guys to see. I was ashamed. Think of it! Me, the luckiest guy in the world! But how could I know what was going to happen!

"I got sore, but it didn't seem to register. It was her mood; she was just overflowing with affection, she just couldn't help showing it; I think it was the baby, because I've seen her like that at home since she knew it was coming. So I got sore, and when she went away she turned and looked back, and I just stood there, and she waved, and I didn't wave back. Oh, Jack, that was a terrible thing to do! But everything would have been all right when I got home; I was crazy for her to be that way, only not in front of the other fellows. She waved, and I just stood there. She waved, and my God, I didn't wave back! And then it happened."

I said, "No one could know what was going to happen. It was just a tough break that it happened right then."

How flat my words were! I couldn't get to him. For some time he was silent; then he exclaimed suddenly in a low voice:

"If she'd only just have died! I mean, if she had to die, if she'd only got sick, so I could take care of her, and been good to her, and then if she'd died I could bury her, and know where she was. But this way—where is she? Is she dead like everybody else? Will I see her when I die? Or will she be somewhere else?"

I assured him he'd see her.

"But she's gone—disappeared, except—she went ..." "That makes no difference."

Again he was silent for a little, and in the recurrent lights I saw him sitting up, his eyes fixed gloomily on some point just in front. He said:

"I *had* to follow her. It seemed to me she was suffering; that is, at first. Her eyes opened—oh, that was awful! I thought I saw her lips move. I felt she was going to say something, or try to; but that was only for a moment. It floated on, and I couldn't understand the expression on her face. I kept trying to; I ran and looked and looked; I fell down and got up; I ran around it, looking at it as it turned; but I couldn't make it out. There were several times her eyes opened and closed! I was scared, too. And I was sick for a while. But she didn't say or do anything; she didn't seem really to try to; she didn't even seem to know I was following. How was it she—it—could pass right through the fence and the trees? It seemed solid, except toward the end; but I may have been mistaken. Why did she go under the water?"

I could only tell him that no one could explain such things. I said, "It was something new, but that doesn't mean it was something outside Nature. It's just something outside our understanding. Remember what Herzog said: he didn't even understand why the mouse eats the cheese. Or why the book would fall. It doesn't explain anything to say that the book falls because of gravity and the mouse eats because it's hungry."

This sort of thing went on. I couldn't calm him. "But this was *new*. And it had to happen to Mary. And it had to happen at just the one moment it shouldn't have happened. It caught me. It left me guilty, and there's nothing I can do about it. I never can square it with her, I never can say I'm sorry; I can't, not for all the rest of my life. It's not fair."

Of course it wasn't fair—but what in life is?

Toward the end Tom grew silent and bitter.

He asked to be dropped at his house, so I pulled up there. I didn't want to leave him alone, but he insisted, and I said I would drop around later in the day. Dawn was filtering through the trees when I got home.

This was the day the New Thing was to strike again.

I WOKE AT ELEVEN and at once rang Tom, but there was no answer. After I had dressed and eaten I drove over. At sight of the house I was dumbfounded. It looked as if a tornado had hit it. Every window was broken, and all around the outside lay a litter of broken furniture and clothing. Small knots of neighbors stood about talking and gaping. I got out of the car and asked what had happened.

Tom had gone crazy, they told me. The police had taken him away. At about half past six he'd started throwing things through the windows. He'd completely lost control of himself. He wrenched apart tables, threw out lamps and chairs and other stuff, smashed his TV-radio against the wall, ran upstairs and broke every window, threw out bedding and clothing and shoes and furniture, and completely wrecked the place, upstairs and down.

By the time the police arrived, he had finished. They found him standing in the doorway, carefully holding in his cupped hands the body of a dead kitten, and he was starting back to put it in the garbage can. His face and hands were bloody, they said; tears ran down and mixed with the blood, and he'd sometimes say things that couldn't be understood; but he seemed to be over the violence of the fit. They had taken him to the station house at Pemberton; and someone said he'd then been transferred to the psycho division of Pemberton General Hospital, where he was being held for observation. He had not resisted.

I went inside the house and looked around. The lower floor was a total wreck. Upstairs it was the same. The bedroom was empty except for the bed frame and a litter of fragments—wood, glass, clothing; the window was a vacant rectangle, and the mattress lay outside on the ground.

I was overwhelmed. The poor man! I looked for the phone, but the wires were ripped out.

At a neighbor's I called the hospital, but they'd tell me nothing more than that he'd been admitted.

I drove there, but they wouldn't let me see him. The psychiatrist in charge wanted to see me, however, and I was directed to him.

He said Tom was in a seclusion room, at present rational and sorry, but bitter and melancholy. He said Tom had kept asking for me, and the psychiatrist set out to pump me of everything I knew about Tom's background in general and the outbreak in particular. But he let out he'd been trying to locate Tom's wife, and from the way he said it I was sure Tom hadn't told what had happened to her, so I kept mum about it. The doctor seemed quite unhappy about the skimpiness of the information. Unfortunately he knew about Tom's being picked up the day before. He said Tom was under observation. Refused to let me see him.

Though worried about Tom and his confinement, I went home. There I thought up a tactic for getting to see him, and after supper I drove back to the hospital and again saw the doctor. I told him Tom had always been sane, but that he'd had a shock, and that anybody in the world might have exploded under the circumstances; I said that Tom's wife had gone away and would never be available for questioning; and I said I had all the information, and could straighten the whole matter out, but he'd have to let me speak privately to Tom first, for I'd not do it without his permission. I made him agree. He himself led me back through the psycho building to where Tom was.

On the way I took in everything I saw. The corridors we passed through were guarded—apparently by pairs of attendants in white. Most of the doors were open, showing rooms just like those of living apartments on the outside. There was one large room from which came the sound of music and voices. I slowed there, and saw over a hundred people, men and women, all in ordinary street clothes, the greater part of them dancing and apparently having a good time. It looked like any other informal dance anywhere, except that the men and women averaged somewhat older. As I caught up with the doctor I asked him what the affair was.

"Just the weekly dance," he told me. "For patients who've sufficiently improved. As far as possible, we give patients all the experiences of normal social contact that they'd have outside. The big difference is that we protect them from things likely to be disturbing."

"But isn't it dangerous to let them come together like that?" I asked.

"It's a very good thing for them."

"I mean, don't they act irrational in front of each other? What if they become violent? Won't they set each other off?"

"It happens, but it's not common and it does little harm. They all know why they're here, and they make allowances. They understand that their leaving depends on their behavior. Most of them like the dances. Of course the patients are graded. As they improve they're put with more advanced groups and are encouraged to take part in wider activities."

Everything was new and interesting to me. We took an elevator to the fourth floor. Here I saw there were no doors on the rooms. In the corridor was another pair of white-clad attendants. Just beyond them, at one of the doorless rooms, we came to a stop.

It was a seclusion room. The walls were not padded, as I'd expected, but were unbroken planes of two-toned brown plastic. There was no window in the room and there was only one object there, a large, low, bare, canvas-covered platform fastened permanently to the middle of the floor.

On one corner of this platform, sitting on his haunches, arms around knees, sat Tom. He had on nondescript pajamas. There was a different kind of bandage under the red lock on his forehead, and in places on the rest of his face and nearby hands were ugly patches of iodine stain. His face wore an expression of sullen brooding. Sitting there so, he looked like some new kind of dangerous ape-man. But he was not dangerous at all; he was only my old boyish friend Tom—impetuous, unlucky, mortally hurt, and now in a little trouble. At sight of me his face softened and he got down and came forward.

The psychiatrist showed he intended to hear what we would say, but I held him to our agreement and he took a position just outside the door where he could watch us, while Tom and I withdrew to the farthest corner of the room and spoke in whispers.

"You know what I did?" Tom asked me shyly.

"Yes, you dope," I answered. "I think you really *are* crazy."

"Maybe I was," he said, his face twisting. "For a while. But I couldn't stand it, Jack. I was full up. Mary's things were all around. I remembered how we'd had it there—a thousand things,, our plans, the baby coming, and now her gone, gone that way. That was what did it. I started smashing things. It gave me some relief. As soon as I'd finished I was all right again."

"Well, it's too bad. All your stuff is ruined. It isn't even junk."

"I don't care. I could never live there again."

"It looks as if you're going to live on that platform for a while," I told him.

He didn't like the thought of that. He told me he had become perfectly all right by the time the police arrived. He said they didn't even have to give him a sedative. He said he did try to escape, though, but couldn't manage on account of the attendants. He told me how they operated.

"It looks easy to get out—no door and the attendants out of sight; but it can't be done. I tried twice, but they caught me and threw me back. Not hurting me, though, and not even getting mad. They know jiu-jitsu, and they're tough babies. They explained things to me. They don't have doors so the patients won't have the feeling they're caged in and abandoned; also they want to keep an eye on what's going on. You're at perfect liberty to try to get away; you can *try*, but they catch you and throw you right back in. But not hurting you, no matter what you do to them. You can try fifty times, and each time you go back. They say all patients, no matter how screwy, learn pretty quickly that it's not profitable to go out the door."

"You didn't tell the doctor about Mary, did you?" I asked.

"No. I'm not *that* crazy. They'd have kept me here for keeps. Did you?"

"No, they'd have kept *me*. But now we've got to figure some way to get you out of here. The doctor's beginning to look impatient."

"What can we tell him?" Tom said gloomily. "He certainly, wouldn't believe the truth."

I hadn't been able to think of anything before, and I couldn't now. For a moment we stood looking glumly at each other, fishing for an idea. Seeing us silent the doctor stepped inside the room.

"Well?"

"My friend won't let me tell you anything," I said. "Both of us can explain his trouble, and if you believed us you'd let him go; but you wouldn't believe us. We don't know what to do."

The doctor didn't like that. I went on:

"But the facts that concern you are simple. Something happened to my friend the night before last. I saw it myself. He had a fit of temper, and you've got him here. If I told you what we saw you'd put me in the next room."

The doctor smiled and pshawed and shook his head. I repeated: "What happened in no concern of yours! This man's normal. But he's impetuous. He had a fit of temper because something terrible happened to him, but now it's all over. It's perfectly safe to let him go."

While I spoke his manner changed. He looked me squarely in the eyes and asked:

"Where's his wife?"

This was awkward; I had a vision of Tom held in that place for weeks while the police searched for Mary—or her dead body. As I hesitated, seeking the best answer, the general quiet was broken and the doctor turned his head and listened. Somewhere in the distance a woman had begun shrieking—a blood-chilling sound—and at once others joined in. Quickly there was a thick confusion of shrieks and cries and yells and shouts. A terrific excitement was occurring somewhere; it sounded like panic.

For just a moment the doctor hesitated, then he said to one of the attendants, "You come with me," and the two of them hurried down the hall. Then there sounded the loud clangor of an alarm bell.

With that, someone nearby started a frantic yelling. The remaining attendant cried to me, "Take care of your friend!" and disappeared from sight. I jumped to the door and saw him wrestling with a male patient several doors down the corridor. At once I turned to Tom and said, "It's your chance! Come on!"

We ran down the corridor toward the elevators, ignoring the attendant's yell to stop. Next to the elevators was the fire escape, and down we hurried several steps at a time, the noise of the distant panic growing louder. On the ground floor I opened the heavy door and peeked out.

The corridor was a place of wildest confusion. Scores of patients were milling about in every excess of behavior—laughing, crying, babbling, shouting, gesturing, screaming. It was mass madness in a madhouse. I couldn't begin to describe it.

We ventured out among them. Here and there a pair of attendants were subduing individual patients, and were having their hands full. I threaded through the horror as rapidly as possible, leading Tom past the room where I'd seen the dancing. I saw, then, that it was the dancers who were panicking. There were still scores of patients in the room. Two of them were jerking on the floor in fits. Others were rushing wildly back and forth, pop-eyed, shrieking, pointing at the ceiling, threshing their arms and yelling nonsense. But all this I took in at a glance, for we were working our way down the corridor.

Until then all the patients I'd seen were dressed in street clothes; now I began to see some in pajamas. They seemed to come from an intersecting corridor. As we pushed through them, one attendant, momentarily free, made a jump for Tom. I straight-armed him, and as he staggered back we escaped into a wild group of patients just ahead.

During this time I gave little attention to the yells of the patients because it was all so crazy, and for this reason I had no idea what had set them off. We were fully occupied in shoving a way through.

We reached the point where the corridor opened into the reception offices. A glance showed that the entrance doors were guarded. I turned back in the corridor and entered an outside room. Tom seemed to read my mind, for as I hurried to one window he ran to the other. Seconds later we were outside on the grass.

"Follow me," I said. "I've got the car."

We ran across the lawn to the gate, Tom in his pajamas at my heels, and a few minutes later I had Tom at my home. Dad wasn't in. I turned on the radio first thing, for I knew there'd be a bulletin warning the Island of the escape. I had just assembled a pair of drinks when it came. The announcer said in effect:

"A panic is under way in the psychiatric building of Pemberton General Hospital. The patients are still out of control. An undetermined number have escaped, and relatives and residents of Long Island are warned to be on the watch for them. They may be dressed either in ordinary street clothes or in pajamas. If you see anyone acting strangely, detain them if possible and call the nearest police station. Be tactful

and watchful, humor them, and don't be panicked. They may be excited, but for the most part they won't be dangerous." He gave a list of local police stations and their phone numbers.

There was no news in that for us. We talked. Tom's spirits were sinking, and I tried to cheer him up.

Twenty minutes later, on our second drink, there came a second bulletin, shocking. Interrupting a program of dance music, the announcer said:

"It was a mass hallucination that caused the panic among the mental patients of Pemberton General Hospital, according to information reaching our newsroom. It occurred among a group of a hundred advanced patients who were assembled at a dance. Patients say that suddenly, as they danced, two heads appeared in the air at one end of the room. They were human heads, with faint outlines of their bodies, and they floated across the room a little below the ceiling. Both were men's heads, they say, and one of them had a small moustache. *The objects floated to the opposite wall and passed through it.* The panic followed at once. Dr. R. A. Connolly, head of the Psychiatric Division, states that the panic was due to contagious hysteria. Dr. Connolly is now at the scene and the patients are rapidly being brought under control. It is now thought that only a few escaped. Hospital officials are sure that the incident is over. Patients and attendants are being questioned in an effort to discover how the mass hallucination started . . ."

## VI

TOM AND I looked at each other, aghast. Again the New Thing had struck. A second wonder had occurred, and two more human beings had been caught and killed. In a whisper, Tom said:

"It was my crew. Jerry had a small moustache. It was Jerry and old man Williams. It's the same time of night, and it was the same as Mary. It must have been the same spot of the field."

"And the heads took the same direction," I added. "This time through the psycho building of the hospital, last time passing the edge of the grounds."

"So I have murdered two more people," Tom murmured.

"Why do you say that?"

"I should have warned the other fellows. I should have told them about Mary."

"They wouldn't have believed you."

"Maybe not, but they might have avoided that spot. At least I could have tried. But I didn't even think about them. All I could think about was Mary. And now they're gone too."

He went on, morbidly accusing himself. I said: "But Tom, you were in the hospital all day. I warned the Lab; I did it for both of us; but Doctor Chambers wouldn't believe me. And you can't blame him. Why, we didn't dare even to tell them at the hospital. It just couldn't be helped. It was something *new* that happened, and we couldn't be expected to suppose it would repeat."

"Now snap out of it. We've got to do some talking to somebody, and it's not quite simple. You're a fugitive from the nuthouse, and I'm guilty of helping you escape. You haven't even any clothes—look at you, in pajamas; all you've got left in the world are at the reception room, in the hands of the attendants at the hospital, and eventually the booby men will be here looking for you. We've got to get away from the house, but first you've got to have some clothes. Mine'll fit you loose—mighty loose—but it can't be helped. Come on upstairs."

I got him into one of my old suits, one I wore when I was thinner, but it wasn't too good. I was a little worried about his behavior. He tended to talk morbidly. He moved as if in a dream. When I tried to rouse him—kidding, for instance, about the fit of the suit—he didn't even seem to hear what I said.

My idea was to go off somewhere in the car and make a plan; but as we were leaving the phone rang. Something made me answer it, and I was glad I did. It was Doctor Chambers, head of Wilson's. He asked:

"Have you heard what's happened at Pemberton General?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"The watchman caught the radio bulletin and told Merriam, and he checked by phone, and it's true; there *was* a panic, and it was over two floating heads and their indistinct bodies—two more! What's

going on? Of course it was only a mass hallucination, but Merriam says that two of our men working in the field have disappeared—and why should the patients have the same hallucination as you? I'm going to the Lab at once. I want you to meet me there. Find Tom Sellers and bring him. Where is he?"

"Right here with me," I answered, and briefly I told him about the commitment and escape. "Has his wife turned up?" he asked.

"No, and you've been told why."

"My God! Well, bring him. Leave as soon as you can. And keep your mouths shut. Has either of you told anyone besides me?"

"Only my father. But I warned him not to say anything."

"Don't tell anybody! We don't want to look like fools. Of course there's some reasonable explanation. Say—the watchman said one of the heads had a small moustache, and Merriam tells me one of our two men had a small moustache. Ask Sellers if that's so."

"He's already told me it's so. And I know the man myself. It's Jerry."

"What's really happening? Well, I'll be right down. You leave at once."

He hung up. I explained the conversation to Tom and started out the door, but he was slow to move and there was a sly look on his face.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Maybe Doctor Chambers can get Mary back," he said.

"Oh stop it, Tom! This isn't normal behavior!"

"It wasn't anything normal what happened," he came back. "What if our seeing her was only a hallucination? If she isn't dead there may be a way to get her back. I've read about things like that. *She could just be in some other dimension.*"

My irritation became pity. "Tom, she's gone. Why do you go on torturing yourself? Don't. It's all over. Get used to it."

I got him in the car. He maintained silence, and I knew my words hadn't made any impression.

Merriam met us at the Lab, and we'd hardly climbed to the second floor when we heard Doctor Chambers' car arrive. In a moment he joined us.

"No sign of the two men?" he asked Merriam. "None."

Doctor Chambers shook his head. He said, "If their wives phone, stall them off."

"Yes, sir."

The Chief led us into his office and asked us to be seated. From his desk he turned to Tom and said: "Tell us what happened that night, Tom. I want to know every single thing in order, just as it occurred." Tom told his story. At certain points both men questioned him closely. I told what happened from my point of view. When we finally were squeezed dry of information we all sat silent for a moment; then Doctor Chambers shook his head.

"No, no," he said, "it can't be. It just can't. Extra dimensions exist only on paper; they're nothing but abstractions, useful in mathematics. It's never happened, it never will happen, it can't happen."

"I've the feeling Mary's alive somewhere," Tom said.

"She's not in any other dimension, if that's what you mean. That would be magic."

Still hopeful, Tom suggested, "I know it's something that's never happened before—but there's never been a setup like the one in the field."

"Are you out of your mind? Two different things happened, one to the head and one to the body. Even assuming for a moment that you did see them together at the end, and that they still exist somewhere, do you imagine there was no damage done? . . . Forgive me, Tom, that was crude. But you're being morbid. You have to learn to face the facts." He reached for a rolled-up blueprint at one side. "Is this the print of the field installation?"

"Yes, sir," said Merriam.

He was already unrolling it. He studied it a moment, then he had Tom and me indicate the exact places everybody had stood the first night. I pointed out that the spot fatal to Mary was on a footpath leading to the exit in the main building—the path which would be used also by the missing men. He didn't comment, but after a moment picked up several small white rolls.

"These the tapes?"

"Yes, sir."

He unrolled and studied them for a little. Then he questioned Tom and me closely, to ascertain as nearly as possible the exact time of the first blow. Our best estimate was 9:20 p.m.

"That's also the time the panic started," Merriam pointed out.

The Chief's mouth tightened. For some time he studied the tapes. At last he raised his eyes. He said: "These tapes contain time-change graphs of all currents and voltages in the carriers of our outdoor circuit. Tests were being run both evenings, but the values were extremely small."

He hesitated, then added, "But perhaps they were critical."

Again he hesitated, then repeated one word, "Perhaps."

A moment later, as if making a reluctant admission, he added, "At 9:20 on both evenings the values were identical."

This was significant! We all sat digesting this, and he went on, "It was surely nothing dimensional: that's most improbable. But something certainly happened. It was of fantastic nature. It happened twice. Each time it appears to have happened under identical conditions of time and place."

He stopped and sat thinking. I ventured:

"We were wondering if it can be explained by the Comprehensive Field Theory."

"Herzog could answer that better than I."

Tom and I told him about our interview with Herzog, and he listened carefully. When we'd finished he said:

"It's clear Herzog didn't believe you. He didn't place the problem. His lecture on understanding, while true enough, was mere generalities. But the situation's different now. There's been a repetition under identical conditions." He sat thinking. "I think I'll call on Herzog. I confess, at this moment it does look like magic. At any rate it's not something for me to try to handle alone . . ."

"I foresee, to investigate this may be a terrific problem, requiring a great deal of work. We shall have to move fast, for Merriam says both men of last night's crew are married, and at anytime we're going to begin having inquiries from their wives. After a little of that the reporters will be on us . . . Merriam, please see if you can reach Herzog on the phone."

This proved impossible; the number was unlisted. At once Doctor Chambers ordered Tom and me to go for him, and we waited while he wrote a note.

We drove back to the city, then, Tom more than ever buoyed with irrational hope. This time Herzog's door was locked, and we had to make a disturbance before someone—a housekeeper, I think—came to the door. She wouldn't let us in, but took the note to Herzog. He came down and listened, through a narrow opening of the door, to our story of the new developments. He seemed skeptical, but went back in and phoned Doctor Chambers; then he followed us to the Lab in a taxi, obviously unwilling to trust himself with us in our car. Not unnaturally. Tom certainly looked wild with his bandage and iodine stains and baggy suit.

Tom said little on the way back, but I, who knew him so well, could tell he was throbbing with hope. For Herzog was committed, now! Herzog himself was on his way to meet the problem! Herzog would find out where Mary was, and perhaps somehow pull her back! It was pathetic.

## VII

WHILE WE WERE gone Doctor Chambers had begun assembling the special troops needed in the coming assault upon the Unknown. He glued himself to the phone, summoning certain of the older members of his staff and several of the lesser employes, then putting through long-line calls to a number of outstanding scientists of the East—shocking them to full wakefulness, extracting promises of secrecy, and persuading them to come to the Laboratory at once. Upon our arrival he at once took Herzog into



his office and remained closeted with him. Tom and I, floating around, found some of the Lab employees already there, each with an assignment. A young staff engineer had been stationed at the switchboard with strictest orders to complete no outgoing calls; manual workers had been set to guard all entrances to the field and main building and the stairs to the upper floors; and there was activity in the machine shop. Curiosity was high, but we pretended the same ignorance as the others.

Soon the first of the summoned scientists arrived—Dr. Mangin, famous biophysicist—and immediately was taken into the Chief's office. On his heels came Professor Downing, chemist and Nobelist; then Doctor Polakoff, nuclear physicist. At irregular intervals others arrived and went in, several with equipment they brought with them. Some time before dawn Tom and I were summoned through the switchboard.

Eleven men were sitting about the Chief's desk, some of them world-famous, several of them members of his staff, all of them masters in their fields. They were of many ages, but their manner was uniformly grave. They looked at us in dead silence as we entered. Merriam placed chairs for us at one side of the Chief's desk.

Doctor Chambers introduced us, saying it was we who had been the witnesses. He tactfully asked Tom if continual reminders of his tragedy would be too painful, and was told they would not. He indicated to us the seated group.

"These gentlemen whose faces you don't know are scientists, come at my urgent summons. They've been told all the facts, and together they have the special knowledge and abilities which make them competent to investigate our problem. The problem is a new one, startling. It appears to be one involving what laymen call the dimensions. It promises to be extremely difficult, and it will require all our combined resources to deal with it. We may fail. But we're going to try.

"We've discussed a number of aspects of the situation and have decided on the preliminary moves. We attack at dawn. 'Attack' is the word, for the phenomenon which has struck twice is like a murdering enemy. The attack will be made by the scientists you see here, together with several others yet to arrive. We are all "generals." It will be an action of generals. Except for you two, only we generals will know what we are about, and even you, I'm sure, won't fully understand what we do. It's of utmost importance that no one outside this room learn what happened or suspect what we shall be doing; the newspapers would have reporters swarming over the place, distracting us and interfering with our work.

"We're in a most vulnerable position. The men outside are curious. Their wives will be gossiping. The wives of the two men who disappeared last night will be phoning at any time. There must be no leak until after 9:20 tonight, at least—for at that time we'll make a major experiment. No leak! No remarks before the other men, and all conferences and conversations here, behind closed doors!

"You two men are in a special position, so we will employ you as is indicated. We have work for you all day. This is the situation and our intentions:

"On Tuesday evening at about 9:20 you witnessed the first phenomenon. The sensory data were of several kinds: a crack, a cloud, the disappearance of the body of the woman, and the floating away of her head. We know the exact spot where the event occurred. Two evenings later, on Thursday, again about 9:20, a repetition of the phenomenon must have occurred. This time many witnesses a mile away saw the floating heads, but nothing more. The question arises: Did both the woman and the men disappear from the same spot? For theoretical reasons it's probable they did; but we need data. Our first object, then, will be to ascertain the number and locations of all active spots in the field, if more than one. Our next object will be to test the daylight behavior of the active spots. We must do this in time for tonight's major experiment.

"The surface of the entire field must be examined. But—the two phenomena involved the space above the surface. Furthermore, at the necks of the three victims there occurred a *difference* in phenomena: below them one thing happened, above them another. So we must examine also the space *above* the surface. There's no telling how high the activity extends, but today, in our limited time, we shall probe up to ten feet.

"All right, then, the surface of the field must be examined, and the space just above it must be probed—and you two, being young and vigorous, will be of help to us there. I've had a dowser made. That's as

good a name as any." He smiled slightly. "It's ready now, in the machine shop. You two men will carry it, if you're willing. It's in two connected parts; each of you will carry one part. The largest element of each part is a 20-foot pole. Fastened to the forward end of the pole, at a right angle to it, is a ten-foot crosspiece. Attached to the crosspiece at intervals are heavy cords which run to similar positions on the crosspiece of the pole carried by the other man. The poles will be carried horizontally, the crosspieces sticking up vertically, ahead. Each of the two parts will be supported by a shoulder harness attached at the position of balance.

"The cords are thirty feet long. They allow the probing of a slice of field thirty feet wide and ten feet high. Since the field is cut into irregular sections by the trenches, you will probe the sections one at a time, going systematically up and down and holding the crosspiece ends straight ahead, the cords taut. You will proceed slowly, eyes on the cords. If anything abnormal happens to any part of the cords, it will indicate an active place—but the place will be well in front of you. The part of the pole behind will serve as a counterbalance, to make the carrying easier. "But you'll be accompanied. Alongside and behind you will follow all but two of the men in this room, and perhaps others who will be arriving. Some of us will watch the ropes, others will carry instruments sensitive to radiation and certain field effects, others will examine the surface of the ground for signs of an abnormal condition; these tasks already have been apportioned. The younger of us will take brief turns at the dowser, to spell you. Mr. Hofkin will be stationed at the switches. Mr. Merriam will continue in full charge of this building, our base.

"Ideally we should cover the field twice, the first time examining and probing with no current in the carriers, the second time probing with the currents at the critical values shown on the tapes. But we haven't time. We'll probe once, with the critical currents on. That may discover any areas where there's activity. Very probably there's only the one . . . Well, these are the first steps. Is what I've said clear?" he asked, looking at us with a faint smile.

We told him it was. He asked Tom:

"It won't upset you too much, helping us in this way?"

"Oh, no, sir." Tom was eager.

"Are either of you afraid?"

We told him we weren't. He glanced out the window.

"We've had to wait for daylight, but now it's light enough to begin. You two get the dowser and wait for us in the field. All right, we're ready gentlemen. Let's go check our instruments." ,

All rose, and a buzz of conversation started. At once he warned them, "Watch every word you say!" Tom and I got the dowsers and passed without challenge through the guarded door to the field; we found out later that we'd been given the run of the place, like the scientists. We adjusted the harnesses, then looked out across the early morning field. The sun had just touched the horizon; it was cool and lovely, the beginning of a beautiful spring day; but ahead, among the upthrust towers, lay the Unknown, and my heart beat rapidly. Tom's face was a mirror of hope.

The scientists soon joined us with their instruments. Doctor Chambers said, "The field is alive, now; all currents at the critical values. We'll do this section first, then take the others around the outside in turn, working toward the center."

At his words I settled the band at my shoulder, separated from Tom to the full width of the cords, and then all of us, as one team, began to probe a slice of the section along the nearest trench.

We proceeded just as Doctor Chambers had explained. It was real work. The dowser halves were heavy to begin with, and quickly grew much heavier. Before long we all took a short rest, and later Tom and I were glad to be relieved briefly by pairs of the younger scientists. Some of them, too, needed the stops for rest, for several of the instruments were bulky and heavy.

IN THE FOLLOWING hours we probed the whole field, except the central section. There was little talking, each man keeping intent on his assigned task—either examining the field or watching his

instrument or the cords ahead. Two new faces joined us. Twice Mr. Merriam himself brought us sandwiches and coffee. We found no area of activity, and nothing untoward happened.

It was with apprehension and extra care that we tackled the triangular central section. This time, at the Chief's direction, we probed first along the boundaries of the three trenches. We found nothing.

We were not far from the known fatal spot, making a second pass inside the first one, when someone cried, "Stop! The cords!"

Everybody froze and looked. Tom and I held the dowsing cords as taut as we could, but on Tom's side they would not hold still. There was a slight motion in them, a wave or vibration. At Doctor Chambers' order we took a small step forward. The motion seemed to increase. He called out:

"Anything show on your instruments?"

"No," was the answer. "Nothing." "No change." "No charge at all? No radiation? No magnetism?" "No. No. None."

Like field dogs we pointed the center of disturbance on the cords.

"One more small step," ordered the Chief.

We obeyed, and the motion this time increased definitely. I watched fascinated.

"Any indications?"

Again the answers came back: No, no change, none, nothing.

Doctor Chambers dropped a square of white cloth at Tom's feet, then he ordered, "Back up and we'll have a look at the cords."

They examined the cords and found no sign of damage or change.

"All right, move left," Doctor Chambers said. "We'll approach from the adjoining segment. Careful!"

He didn't have to warn us. We backed, moved sidewise, and again felt toward the fatal spot. Again came the unnatural movement in the cords, and once more he dropped a white cloth marker at Tom's feet.

"Nothing on your instruments?" he asked.

There was nothing.

He ordered us back for another approach on the next segment, and dropped a marker as before. In that way, moving with great caution, a rough circle of about 40 feet in diameter was marked out. In the center of the circle was the known fatal spot.

At that point the Chief had us back away and probe over the top of every trench in the field, but we found nothing. In all the field, then, there was evidence of abnormal activity only at one place. We returned and stood looking at the circle, resting, wondering, the scientists making comments of a technical nature which in part I didn't understand. They seemed struck chiefly by the fact that none of their instruments had reacted to the strange activity.

Doctor Chambers broke our inaction. "Now we'll examine the ground there," he said, and he sent me back to Mr. Hofkin at the switch panel with an order to cut all currents. I hurried, telling Hofkin briefly what we had found. Upon returning I found the scientists in a ring at the border of the marked area, their instruments laid aside. Slowly they closed in toward the center, scrutinizing carefully the ground in front of them as they advanced. Several times one of them went down on his knees to look more closely at something, while the rest stopped where they were. Gradually they neared the fatal spot at the center. I was in back of the ring, but I could see that the central area seemed different from the rest of the field. It was bare there; the weeds, elsewhere knee-high, were missing, so that there was no evidence that the footpath passed through it.

The men were nearly elbow to elbow, when one, then another next to him, went down on hands and knees and brought their heads close to something they saw on the ground. Those opposite finished scanning the remaining small area between, then gathered about the two who were kneeling. I heard exclamations of excitement. I saw one of the kneeling men pick up something, then get to his feet, holding what he'd found on the palm of one hand, while all crowded about to look. There was a confusion of talk. Several times I heard the word "flesh." After a moment I saw the Chief look about on the ground again, and himself pick up something. He turned it over—and the excitement redoubled. All started looking about then, but nothing more was picked up. They gathered close about their finds again, and

examined them and talked and exclaimed. I was dying with curiosity when the Chief turned and called to Tom and me. He pointed to three objects on the palm of the other man's hand and asked:

"What are those things?"

We put our eyes close to them. They looked like animal tissue. They were pink, fluted stubs, tubular in shape, about a quarter of an inch in diameter and nearly an inch in length. There were three of them.

"What would they be doing in the field?" he added, as I still examined them.

"I haven't any idea," I answered. "They look like parts of some animal. Parts that, stick out. You can see where they were torn away."

He showed me what he held in his own hand. It was a man's rubber heel, much worn.

"We found this too," he said. "Ever see it in passing by here?"

"No, sir," both Tom and I answered.

He turned it over. On the other side, the *shoe* side, where it had been attached, was stuck a fourth bit of tissue. I was wordless.

"I wonder, could this heel have been on the shoe of one of the missing men," the Chief said. "Where were they working?"

With excitement Tom and I led everybody to the trench where the two men had been working the first night. Helped by us the Chief let himself down in the trench and tried fitting the rubber heel in some of the many footprints in the dirt at the bottom; then he straightened and looked up at us.

"It fits," he said. "It was on the shoe of one of the two missing men. There's no imprint of a shoe with a missing rubber heel, so we may suppose it was torn off while the men were in the active area."

We helped him out of the trench. What excitement there was then! Those scientists were dignified, sober men, and until then they'd spoken surprisingly little, keen as their interest obviously was—but now they gabbled like children.

"It might be significant that one of the nubs of flesh is stuck to the heel," one ventured.

"Those nubs aren't from any living animal," another kept saying. "I'm no specialist, but I'm quite sure . . ."—and he spouted technical terms in support of his opinion.

They examined the stubs again with great care. They came to agree that they were animal tissue; that they were fairly fresh, as if they had recently been on the living animal; that they had been violently torn away; that they'd never heard of an animal with exterior stubs like that. Most of them supposed that the one stub had become stuck to the top of the heel by the heel's falling on it, until Doctor Herzog quietly pointed to the possibility of a spacetime transfer of the stub from some space or time unknown; then for a moment they were silent.

Doctor Chambers said, "We need a zoologist and a biologist, and maybe a botanist. I'll send for them."

"Better get a paleontologist, too," said Doctor Herzog.

"Yes," said the other, as if reluctantly. "Well, there should be some lunch waiting for us: let's go back and eat; it's getting on. I'll join you in a few minutes. These young men will handle the poles, and I'll explain it to them here."

He turned to us, and while the others started back over the field to the main building, he said:

"Our next job will be to find out the behavior of this area under various sets of parameters involving current combinations, time of day, and so on. We'll be concerned with the entire volume of space above it to the height of ten feet. It's already noon and there's much to do, so we have to work fast.

"The activity seems to be a time-space-matter-gravity effect which probably won't persist. There's no time to set up proper experiments, no time even to devise them, so we have to use the means close at hand. It's been decided to stud this area with wooden poles, and observe on them the effect of the activity. The poles will project ten feet and will be laced horizontally with cord; I'll show you how we want the cord when you're ready. Mr. Merriam has ordered enough poles and cord for a thirty-foot square, and they should be here soon. He's also ordered a post-hole drill rig. When they come I want you to take charge of drilling the holes and inserting the poles. All currents will be off, of course, and the switches will be watched. The poles will be twelve feet long; set them two feet in the ground; pack each one in tightly. Start in the center and set them in rows fifteen inches apart. If you haven't enough to reach

to the borders, no matter—fill the center. The job must be finished as quickly as possible. Use any of the men who are unassigned. And be sure not to tell them anything."

The orders were clear. We walked back to the main building together, where we found that the drill rig had been delivered. Tom and I quickly ate something at the trestles set up for the scientists in one of the labs (the other employees ate separately); then we started drilling, and when the poles came I took out every available man and we set them in. There were almost enough to fill the marked area. By late afternoon we had the poles interlaced with cords and the job was done. From the main building the area bristled like a huge porcupine.

Tom had been concerned all morning about Pinto, and at that point he got permission to go home to feed and water her.

## VIII

WITHOUT DELAY began, then, the series of experiments which had been planned before dawn that morning. The scientists—all but Doctor Herzog and two other physicists—took position for their observations at the windows of a big laboratory on the top floor rear of the main building, overlooking the field. Many pairs of field glasses had been obtained for this purpose. Doctor Chambers flatly refused to let anyone observe from either the field or the towers, pointing out that with a phenomenon whose nature included factors of space and time it must not be assumed that parts of the field harmless in the morning were necessarily harmless in the afternoon.

I hung around in back, out of their way. Hofkin as before was stationed at the switch, placed in the basement, and continuous contact was maintained with him by phone.

The first test was the most direct and important one. Step by step Hofkin was to bring the currents in the carriers to exactly the values of the critical moments of 9:20 p.m., reproducing the electrical parameters which had brought about, or accompanied, the fatalities.

By phone Hofkin read off to Doctor Chambers the steps of the current changes. The Chief repeated each figure aloud, elbows propped on the sill of an opened window, in his left hand the receiver, in his right the glass held to his eyes. I too watched through a pair of glasses.

I sensed from the Chief's manner when the critical values approached, but my glass showed no change. The poles remained upright and motionless.

Then, "Critical values!" repeated the Chief.

I, like all the others, watched intently through my glass. I saw a change. No crack, no puff of cloud, but motion. The tops of the poles at the center began to vibrate rapidly through a distance of perhaps a foot. From the center outward the vibrations gradually changed in direction and diminished in amplitude, and I could detect no motion at all in the outermost poles.

For a moment we watched the mysterious motion; then came the order:

"Cut all currents."

The poles became motionless.

"Restore all currents."

The vibration resumed. The hitherto silent observers now began to make exclamatory remarks, chiefly over the peculiarity of the changing directions of vibration from the center toward the outside.

"Cut all currents, Hofkin," the Chief said then. "We're going out to have a look." The poles came to rest. "Good. Stand by, of course. We don't want anyone touching the switches."

Tired as all the scientists were by then, every one went out on the field to examine the effects of the activity on the poles and cords. I thought I'd better stay behind, and watched through my glass. They soon were back. The Chief went to the phone.

"Nothing showed, Hofkin," he said. "No damage, not a sign of change. It must be a step function.

"Now we'll continue with the tests as planned. You have a list of the parameter combinations we want to try. I'm going to report to Doctor Herzog and the other physicists; we've got to discuss what we observed. I'm turning the phone over to Professor Downing. He'll have my copy of the list, and will keep a record of the effects of the changes, if any."

He spoke to Professor Downing and left. I wished I could have gone with him to his conference! Professor Downing had just set himself for the new series of experiments when I saw Tom motion me from the doorway. I stepped out. He told me the handyman had been seeing to Pinto, so he'd come right back to the Lab on her. Tom was cheered by my account of the experiment. He tiptoed to the back of the room with me and we took turns watching through my glass.

The new tests were under way. Professor Downing kept referring to a paper in front of him—a list of the current combinations to be tried. The procedure might be explained like this: Assume there were five lines carrying current. Holding four of the currents constant, the fifth would be varied in steps below and above its critical value and the results on the poles, if any, noted through the glasses. This process would be repeated with each of the other four carriers. After the five series of such tests, the variations would be made in pairs of carriers, then threes, and so on. It was a standard investigative procedure; monotonous, perhaps, to the layman; but then the layman still knows so little about the methods of research.

We stood and watched nearly an hour, but in not one test did the vibrations of the poles recur. The values which brought activity were indeed critical!

Then we began to hear somewhere an irascible quacking, a sound ultra-familiar to Tom and me: clucks. A few minutes later Dr. Chambers entered the room. He talked briefly with the observers, noted with much interest the negative results of the tests, then called Tom and me over to a back corner. Quietly, so as not to disturb the experiments in progress, he asked

Tom in a tone of speculative contemplation. "Is that your horse out front?"

"Yes, sir."

He thought a moment, then said:

"Some ducks have come. Mr. Merriam ordered them this morning; they're the one kind of animal at hand for use as guinea pigs. We'd thought to use them in experiments, both this afternoon and tonight: we'd planned to put them at the active spot, some low, some higher, then turn on the current and observe. Now they're here, but they're making a devil of a racket, and everyone downstairs is burning with curiosity about them, and I hardly dare use them, for it might tip off to others the kind of experimenting we're doing, and rumors would get out and the reporters would be on us. It can't be done secretly, unless you can tell us how to remove their quack. Anyway, there's hardly enough time. Our first experiment with flesh and blood will have to be the main one, tonight.

"We can use them tonight, but it's just been suggested that it might be better to use a single animal, a horse. We could tie it in place. Its head will come to about the height of a man's head. If the phenomenon repeats, the body should disappear and the head float off, showing in one animal the plane separating the two types of effect. It's a good idea. But horses are scarce, and we've not got much time. Do you know where we might be able to get one, quick? Any old horse, as long as it can stand up. We ought to have it here in an hour."

For an instant Tom hesitated, then he said: "You can have my horse."

"Now, Tom, I didn't come to try and get your horse!" the Chief said instantly. "I don't *want* your horse: I only want to know, can you tell us where we can get one, right away."

"There isn't any place you can get one quick. But that's got nothing to do with it. I want you to use Pinto."

The Chief paused a moment.

"I understand that you've had your horse since you were a boy, and are very fond of it."

"That's so, but she's old; her life is over. I don't want her any more. She'd only remind me of my wife." "It's very doubtful if there'd be any pain."

"Even if there was, I guess what happened to my wife can happen to a horse."

Doctor Chambers paused again. He was being extremely tactful.

"It seems unfair, Tom. You've lost so much." "I tell you I don't want her any more."

"We'll reimburse you, of course."

"No. No money. I'm glad she'll be able to help you. I'm grateful for all you people are doing. I know it's not for me, but I'm in the middle of it, and maybe Pinto'll help you find where my wife is."

A pained look came to Doctor Chamb face. He said firmly:

"Tom, you mustn't think you're ever going to see your wife again."

"Well, I can't help hoping. I've read things with theories about the dimensions. It could be like a hole opened in the universe, and people disappear into the hole. If the thing could be reversed, maybe she could be pulled back. So I at least could see she's really dead."

The Chief shook his head. Gently but still firmly he said:

"You'll never see your wife again. Not even dead. Get that into your head, Tom. All of us here have been completely upset by what's happened. We don't understand it. Perhaps the human mind *can't* understand it. We're all so ignorant! Science has hardly made a start! Maybe some day there'll be such a thing as interdimensional traffic, but right now I can't imagine it. My utmost hope is that we can get the phenomenon to repeat a few times, so we may study it and get data.

"But thanks very much for Pinto. Nothing could help us more. I'll have to ask you to tie her in place. You'll have to remove a row of poles to get her in, then replace them. I'll help you. Let's do it right now. We all of us had better be getting ready for tonight."

He stopped the tests and asked for volunteers to oversee two tower installations of floodlights and remote-control stereo movie cameras; the physical work would be done by junior members of the staff. Older members of the staff would install the available apparatus around the danger area. While they did this, he, with Tom and me, would place the horse.

Tom went alone to fetch Pinto. Poles and cords were removed; Pinto was tied to one pole by her halter and to others by ropes tied around a pad placed on a hind leg; then the poles and cords were replaced. To my surprise Tom did not show any special feeling, he worked thoughtfully and said nothing; but before the cords were replaced, at a moment when the Chief and I were at a distance, I caught sight of him at Pinto's head, affectionately stroking her muzzle. It was decided, for Pinto's comfort, not to tie her head high just then; the Chief said he'd send someone to do it a little before the currents were turned on. When we were finished Tom and I accompanied the Chief on his inspection of the light and movie and instrument installations. By dusk everything was completed and checked, and all returned slowly and wearily across the field to the main building.

A simple buffet supper had been laid on the trestles. Tom and I were invited to eat with the scientists, but we felt in the way and took some sandwiches and containers of coffee to the top-floor lab and ate at the windows overlooking the field. Rather, I alone ate; Tom only drank the coffee, for he was depressed from the hope-destroying words of Doctor Chambers. Night had arrived. The moon, not quite round, lit the field clearly, showing the tall towers, the long black scars of the trenches, and the dark patch where the poles were set. Even through glasses we could not make out Pinto, standing tethered in their midst.

We watched for a long time, not saying a word, each trapped in the web of his own thoughts—Tom's as gloomy and bitter as you may imagine. Suddenly the two installed lights flooded the central area, and picking up our glasses we could trace the outline of Pinto. just as suddenly the lights went out, leaving the field plunged into a deeper darkness. A few minutes passed in silence, then Tom said:

"Where's Herzog?"

"Down in one of the small labs on the floor below," I told him. "Working. That is, thinking. Filling papers with equations."

"Show me where it is," he demanded. "I want to see him."

I refused, saying it would be unpardonable to interrupt him at such a time—that he was hard at work, and that his time was uniquely important.

"Well, my seeing him is uniquely important to *me*," he retorted grimly. He threatened to find out from someone else, and it ended by my taking him there.

He knocked. After a moment Herzog's voice told us to come in.

## IX

WE ENTERED a small, brightly lighted room. Dr. Herzog was sitting on a stool at a table, before

him a page with several lines of scribbled pothooks, at his left a box of paper, and on the floor at his right a waste can half filled with crumpled sheets. He slid about as we entered and a slight smile parted the stubble of face and head.

"My midnight friends!" he exclaimed gently. "I've had no real chance to tell you how sorry I am that it was true about your wife," he said to Tom. "I didn't believe you. I thought you both were victims of an hallucination. It's probability .8, eh? I still can hardly believe it. You're upsetting the whole of modern physics, young man. Doctor Chambers has just told me you offered your horse. That's fine. We have to try and find out. We have to learn the secrets. We may have so little time. We're caught by surprise; we're not ready with proper experiments, we even lack vital equipment. The horse is ideal. Long neck, and head the height of a man's. We shall soon see." He stopped speaking and looked at us, waiting.

It put Tom on the spot. "We shouldn't be interrupting you, and I'm sorry; but Tom here insisted, and I couldn't prevent him."

Herzog looked at Tom questioningly. Tom said:

"I—I was wondering—I was hoping that maybe now you could explain what happened to my wife." Dr. Herzog sighed. "Have you forgotten my little lecture?"

"But you didn't believe us then, and since then the thing's happened again."

"I told you, I understand so little. I work, but we have so little data. We need far more. Data! We need data!"

"Well, excuse me, sir—I thought—you've been here all afternoon, and I thought you might have got some idea. . . ."

"Well, it's just possible there may be a tiny crack, if I could find the right wedge. I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. In the copy of my book you will see introduced somewhere about page seventeen a constant with the value 59.18. This morning when I saw the print of the field layout I noted that the central section of the field, bounded by three trenches and their carriers, made what looked like a perfect equilateral triangle; 60-degree angles in each corner. Now, 60 degrees is very near to 59.18. Of course the print was only a drawing; the actual angle on the field is something else; but it's interesting. What if the angle on the field is 59.18? Or what if the constant *should* be the angle on the field? There was no time to survey the triangle with high accuracy, but it will be done tomorrow. Meanwhile I've been probing here with symbols."

"And you haven't found anything?" Tom asked. "No. But I have the feelings. You know about them? Certain vague feelings of being close to a success—tantalizing—frustrating, yet not quite unpleasant—a thing common at a certain stage of the creative process."

"Do you think you'll get it soon?"

"One always hopes. But I felt that way about a key section of the Field Theory eight years before I was able to resolve it!"

"Then you don't expect to understand, soon, what happened?"

"I've a motto: 'Always hope, never expect.' I hope. But there's so little data! We have almost nothing. As for understanding—in ten or a hundred years, after thousands or millions of experiments, men may be controlling the phenomenon, but that doesn't mean they'll understand it. You'd better not hope at all." I could see that each time Doctor Herzog spoke, Tom felt his words like a blow.

"I mustn't be impatient with you, young man, for you're distraught—and why shouldn't you be? Why shouldn't you wonder what happened! But you have to realize we're not magicians. In all probability our chances for obtaining data dwindle rapidly—and when will the phenomenon occur again? Consider. The two strokes occurred on nights 1 and 3. We are hopeful it will repeat this evening, on night 4, but that's only a hope. Since night 1, conditions in our part of the cosmos have changed greatly. The moon's in a different position relative to the sun; the Earth has moved 18.5 times 60 times 60 times 24 times 3 miles through space, and our solar system has moved a further amount. Matter, gravity, space, time—they interlock. That's not the word—there are no words for such things—but they comprise something like a Whole with various interoperating Manifestations. Change one thing and all the others are affected. Put more accurately, with change of one manifestation all others change. Sneeze, and the cosmos is jolted. Nothing's ever the same again. We are part of one Field which contains everything or which is



everything. The fatal activity in our little field, and the fateful forces of the cosmic Field—they change. And our *understanding* of the cosmic Field is something comparable to the microbe's understanding of calculus. Practically zero. I hope for more data tonight, and for many nights. I can't expect it. It could be that man will require generations to harness the forces detectable in the center of the field out there, and it may be that man will have to evolve through millions of years to understand them."

Tom was shattered. He mumbled:

"Then—you've still no idea where my wife is. I mean, what happened to her."

Doctor Herzog shook his head. "It was a new thing, and we lack data."

Tom just stood there.

"Let me tell you something, young man. You know about our finding the pieces of animal tissue?"

"Yes, sir."

"Several experts examined them this afternoon—a zoologist, a biologist, two paleontologists. They all say they're animal tissue, almost fresh, very recently torn off. They say they came from no animal now living on Earth. Do you get the implications of this?"

"I think so."

"The biologists call the things tentacles. They say they are full of nervous tissue, rather like the gray matter of the human brain. The paleontologists say that it's unlikely that any creature bearing such tentacles ever lived on Earth. Do you understand what this suggests?"

"The future," Tom murmured. "Or parallel worlds."

"Our ignorance!" Herzog exclaimed, and for a moment he sat in thought. "I told you my motto, but as always there's an exception. *Don't* hope to learn anything about your wife. Don't. It's unhealthy. It's insane! Face it: Your wife is gone. You'll never see her again. She's dead, only her body can't be seen. She's not out of the universe. Nothing can escape from the Whole. She's still part of it, in a new way. Part of the Field. Of which you and I at this moment are part, of which everybody and everything is part.

"Go away, now, and let me work. I assure you—I know it sounds impossible—but I assure you that gradually, in time, you'll get over this. All things change with time. Time is a factor in the Field. In the Field you are still related to your wife. In it and through it you will some day have a new status with regard to her. Endure. For a while, just endure. This will pass. I promise you, even this will pass."

We left him, returning to the top-floor lab. Tom was completely broken now. I knew he'd been secretly hoping for a miracle, but I'd not realized how much. He looked out the window. Unseen out there under the moonlight, standing in the middle of that dark patch, waited patient old Pinto. On that spot his wife had been struck.

"Three days ago at this time Mary was alive," he murmured after a while. "Two days ago at this time the kitten was alive. Yesterday at this time Jerry and old man Williams were alive. I killed them all."

"You didn't kill any of them!" I objected.

"And I'm killing Pinto in a few minutes," he went on, heedless. "If I hadn't got sore at Mary I'd have kept her there a little, and walked her back myself, and maybe nothing would have happened, and if it did happen we'd both be together, at least. I killed the two others by not warning them. I killed the kitten because—oh, Jack, that was the worst of all!"

Surprised at this I asked, "Tell me about the kitten."

"I murdered it!"

"You can't murder a kitten," I said. "Maybe you killed it . . ."

"I killed it. I kill everything. Everything I touch has to die. Mary, the two fellows, the kitten, and now Pinto. But I'm consistent. I make it complete."

"Tell me about the kitten," I said, for I saw there was a deep wound there. I had to press him.

"The little kitten, a mere ball of fluff, hardly the weight of a handkerchief!" he cried in a rush of emotion. "I *like* kittens. Who can help liking a kitten! Mary'd picked it up somewhere, so skinny and tiny you couldn't tell when it was in your hand. Well, the night I came home from Herzog's I went in the house and looked around. I was full of bitterness and hate. I stood looking at Mary's apron on a chair, where she'd tossed it before coming to see me on Pinto. I looked at it about to burst. Then the kitten—the kitten came and rubbed against my shoes—and it kept coming—and—and I picked it up and choked it

to death. That tiny innocent little bunch of fluff! I looked at it, warm and limp in my hand. The poor little thing, it didn't weigh more than a handkerchief, and I'd killed it. It trusted me; it was hungry; it was playing with my shoelaces, and I killed it with my hands. It was then I went crazy. I tore through the house. I hated myself. First Mary; that funny, friendly kitten."

"Well, you shouldn't have done it," I said. "You should always be kind to animals. Everybody should be perfect." I changed my tone. "Look, Tom, it was only a kitten. It had hardly begun to live. It probably didn't suffer any more than if you'd stepped on its tail. It never knew what it was all about. It's simply not important. Forget it."

Slowly and earnestly Tom said, "If I could change places with that kitten, I'd do it. And with the two men, I'd do it. And if I thought they'd let me, I'd change places with Pinto out there . . ."

I must have been blind.

## IX

Tom GREW silent and we sat looking out over the moonlit field. We saw a man go out and enter the patch, then return—someone sent to tie Pinto's head in the high position. A time passed. Then down stairs we heard the sound of many voices, followed by footsteps on the stairs. Someone flicked on the room lights and the group of scientists entered.

"Ah, here you are," said Doctor Chambers. "We were looking for you. It's time for the final briefing." He sat on a high stool, and Herzog sat on another near him, while all the others gathered around.

He explained what each was to do. Hofkin was to be at the switches. Three men were to remain in that room and observe with glasses what might occur. All the others were to take stations at given intervals outside the fence of the field. If the horse's outline floated away, those nearest would try to follow it. One station seemed more important than the others because of the probability that the head would move in the direction taken by the previous ones; Doctor Herzog was assigned this. I was to be with him, because I knew the countryside. For the same reason Tom was to accompany Doctor Chambers—if he thought it would not be too distressing.

"It may be asking too much, Tom," the Chief said kindly. "Don't come if you'd rather not."

All eyes went to Tom. After a moment he stammered:

"I don't want to."

"We understand," the Chief said. "I don't think I'd want to go myself, in your place." He turned to the others. "That reminds me: We heard from the hospital. All room lights will be out. There'll be no panic."

He looked at his watch. "It's two minutes of nine. There's ample time to get to our stations, but none to fool around. Pick up a pair of binoculars, then get to your stations and wait. At 9:19:30, half a minute before minute zero, the floodlights will come on for just a second. That's the warning. At 9:19:55 the floodlights will come on to stay. Five seconds later, at 9:20, the currents will be cut in. They'll come in at the critical values. Adjust your glasses in advance. Keep focused on the head, and, if you can, follow it after it leaves the field. It's a pity we can't follow it with instruments—but at least we may see what becomes of it . . . All right, any questions? If not, let's go."

I joined Dr. Herzog and we started to leave. As I passed Tom the physicist smiled and said to him: "We try to learn the secrets."

Tom looked at him with a strange expression, then looked the same way at me, not removing his eyes all the way to the door. That was our farewell. I never saw Tom alive again.

I led the way for Doctor Herzog and half a dozen other scientists. As we moved along the fence the others dropped out one by one, till we continued alone. We arrived at our station with nine minutes to spare, and carefully adjusted our glasses to the dark patch of poles. I could not make out Pinto.

As we waited I pointed out to Doctor Herzog the positions of those on the field at the moment the Unknown had struck Mary. There, close, in the same moonlight, was the trench where the two men had remained working. There I had stood, there Tom, and along there Mary had passed on her way to the place of mystery. Here was where Tom had gone up over the fence, and here I had fallen stunned. The head came straight toward us, and passed through the fence right there. The hospital and Big Pond were,

in that direction . . .

Doctor Herzog listened attentively but said very little. We waited, and it seemed a long time. Then suddenly the floodlights blinked. For a second the center of the field stood bathed in light, and the dark patch in the center became a bunch of bristles. As we raised our binocular glasses all was dark again. We waited, glasses ready. The passing seconds seemed minutes. Then, again suddenly, the floodlights came on. I held my breath.

*From the patch of bristles came a thin c-r-a-c-k, and with it a white cloud—just as before. Through my glass I watched the cloud thin and disappear. A large irregular object appeared against the bristles—Pinto's head and a faint vapor-like outline of his body. It came a little sharper above, and darker below. It seemed to grow.*

"It's on our side," I breathed.

Glasses up, we watched it. The head grew larger. It seemed to remain in the same spot, but it kept growing. That meant only one thing. I said:

"It's coming in our direction."

Doctor Herzog made no comment, but I could sense him tense beside me. We waited. Suddenly I cried out:

"No! Oh no, no, no!"

I'd seen something else, and in a flash I understood. There was another object behind the first one, a smaller object, previously occluded but now partly visible. The first was Pinto, but the other I still could not make out distinctly. But I knew! A sharp pain cut through my chest, and my heart seemed to stop beating. I cried out:

"It's Tom too!"

Dr. Herzog breathed in suddenly but said nothing. We watched. I cried:

"There's the bandage!"

Everything around me seemed to disappear except the dreadful objects now coming toward us. Through indescribable emotions I saw them move outward from the lighted center, Pinto's head coming larger and larger, and just beyond it, a trifle to one side, the visible part of a smaller head, one with a bandage on the forehead, floating evenly at a constant distance in the same soft motion. With them were portions of poles and cord.

I let down my glasses. Eight feet or so in the air they came on, slowly and horizontally, a little to our left. They were opaque. Now they were only 30 feet away from us, and the moonlight showed them clearly. Pinto was facing away from us, tilted somewhat from the vertical position it would have in life; Tom was nearly upside down and pointed to our right, and his eyes were closed. They floated nearer, then passed one after the other through the fence. I heard Doctor Herzog gasp.

They passed us a dozen feet away and went straight across the i arrow side road and the fence of the opposite field. I started after them, Doctor Herzog following. I squeezed through the fence and held the wires separated, to help him through, but he stumbled to a post and held tight to it and motioned me on. I saw he was panting, in physical distress; his heart wasn't adequate. He gasped:

"You go. You! Go on!"

I left him and chased after the two objects, coming up to them at the far side of the field. They passed among the trees. For a second I turned and saw Herzog still holding to the post, and two other men with him; then I followed Tom's and Pinto's outlines.

They passed between the trees and through them. Straight ahead and out the far side they went, smoothly, inexorably, rotating slowly and independently, Pinto in front, Tom several feet behind. They kept eight feet from the ground—a little more, a little less. When they came to a hollow in the ground they seemed to react to it, and lowered somewhat.

The two, with some fragments of poles and cord. Two that I knew so well. Pinto with her halter. Tom with the bandage on his forehead, the inevitable lock of red hair on the bandage. Pinto's eyes closed

now, mouth moving a little. Tom's eyes now half open, but no expression under the iodine stains on his face.

They passed along the way of Mary. The way toward the edge of town, the way across the farm, the way which bore a million times their footprints—and Mary's too, and mine.

I followed at a fast walk, a little behind. I could have touched them; I thought of it, but didn't dare. I imagined my hand going through, and Tom, face turned toward the stars, eyes open, not showing that he was aware, but perhaps knowing what I did ...

We came to a pond and they continued straight across, lowering a little over the surface. I ran around and caught up with them on the far side. We passed a farmhouse, quiet and lonely in the moonlight, a single window lighted. We passed the outbuildings—on, on to an unknown destination.

The hospital came into sight, and we passed the southern edge of its grounds. Were the mental patients still trembling at the unreality of the reality they had witnessed?

We passed the hospital.

I was out of breath now, and tired. I stumbled often. I got caught in barbed wire. I bled. Sometimes I spoke. I thought:

Tom! If you could speak! Can you see me? Can you know I'm following? Is your mind there?—or in some other, unimaginable place? Do you understand now? Can't you indicate it? But your eyes move!

Torn—you shouldn't have stolen back to Pinto! The pain would have passed! But the trenches were there, and it was so easy. . .

Tom—are you aware you are with Pinto? Your old Pinto—your horse, your companion, for years inseparable—parts of one organism, almost—once galloping across this countryside—now again together, floating across this same countryside—companions once more on a last incomprehensible journey. . . . Where are you going?

Say something, Tom! Talk to me, tell me what's happening. I saw your lips move! Where are you going? What are you feeling? Don't you know I'm here? It's Jack—your old friend . . . but your face is toward the moon, your eyes are now closed, and you float to a destination unknown and unimaginable. See—this is your father's farm! Look, there was where we found the Indian bones! Can you remember that? Can you remember at all? Here's the house. No one lives here now, Tom. The kids have broken the windows, the braver ones have dared the ghosts and entered, and smashed what they found, and played roughly; but it's your house, you were born here, you grew up here, there's not an inch that has not known you as you ran eager on your important boys' business. Can you remember, wherever your mind is now?

To Tom's face came no sign that he knew I was there. But his eyes half opened. He floated past in another time and space. Still with Pinto.

They floated evenly in their straight transit, always rotating a little, passing the outbuildings and the meadow and nearing the pond. I followed despairingly.

Tom—here's where we tried to get the frogs to fight! No luck at it, none at all. They wouldn't fight, and they're long since dead, whatever that is, and now you're different too, Tom, floating so mystically over this crumb of the universe, once all yours, now so serenely abandoned. Here's the pond! Once white with ducks! Do you remember the boats?

The heads lowered as they crossed the water, and as before I ran around and caught up with them on the far side. Still straight ahead they floated. Through the trees, into the little clearing . . .

Do you remember this place, Tom? The hours we fought here, and the many times we sat down to rest and cry? And how you came to me on Pinto and made me take a ride. I didn't want to take that ride. I was afraid. But you were doing such a favor; I had to do the one thing that would get you feeling square toward me again. So I rode Pinto—Pinto, do you remember it?—and I was so glad when I could get off

They floated eternally on, Pinto with her halter, Tom with his bruises and the iodine stains and the bandage on his forehead and the stubborn red lock on the bandage. I thought the heads looked thinner now; of thinner substance. There were moments I thought I could see through them.

Straight on they went, idly rotating, floating serenely through the moonlight. They came to the lake.

By then I was exhausted.

I stood on the edge and watched. Gradually they lowered until they were just over the surface. Ghostlike, I thought I saw their entire bodies. I saw them touch the water, then ride evenly downward until they were gone. I watched for a long time, but I did not see them again ..

I thought, have you found Mary, Tom? Do you understand, now, what happened to her? Is she able to be happy? Is she surprised that you came with Pinto? Will you be together for a long time?