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**COLD FRONT**

By Hal Clement



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# Rain Check

by

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym Lewis Padgett.

First published *Astounding*, July 1946.

*It wasn't human, or even remotely human. The race that created it had given it great powers. But one power it desperately wanted was denied it—*

The thing that seemed to be in the transparent block came from the past, not the future, and its alienage was due more to environment than to heredity. It had no heredity, except by proxy. The iGlann—which is not a typographical error but a pre-paleolithic race—created it when the glaciers began to grind down on the Valley. However, the iGlann died anyway, and, partly because they weren't human, none of their artifacts was ever found by later cultures of homo sapiens.

The iGlann were sapiens but they weren't homo. So the thing they made during their last desperately experimental days was a super-iGlann. It wasn't a superman, or probably Sam Fessier couldn't even have communicated with it when he found the transparent cube.

This happened a little before World War II.

Fessier came back to his apartment in a dither. He was a thin, red-haired man of twenty-eight, with blue eyes, a harassed expression, and at the moment a great longing for a drink. After he had had one, he discovered that company was even more desirable, so he went out, bought a fifth, and went to see Sue Daley.

Sue was a pretty little blonde who wanted to be a career woman. She worked for an advertising firm, a position which Fessier loudly scorned. He himself was a gag cartoonist, one of that band who habitually see the world through slightly cockeyed glasses. The passing of years had changed his allegiance from Winsor McCay to such mad modern Titians as Partch and Addams. (Titian is not a typographical error either, but the second i may be omitted without altering the sense.)

"I'm going to change my name," Fessier said after the third cocktail. "You can call me Aladdin from now on. Gad!"

Sue tried to scowl. "Don't use that ridiculous word."

Fessier said sadly, "Can I help it if most of my publishers are hypersensitive about blasphemy? I've got to be so careful about what I put in my captions that I've started talking that way. Anyhow, you missed the point. I said I'm going to change my name to Aladdin."

Sue picked up the cocktail shaker and made it tinkle. "Two more," she said. "One apiece. Drink up and then tell me the gag."

Fessier pushed her away as she tried to pour, "I suppose I'll meet this skepticism everywhere from now on. No, really, Sue. Something's happened."

She sobered. "Really, Sam? If this is one of your—"

“It isn’t,” he said desperately. “The hell of it is, it’ll sound like a gag. But I can prove it. Remember that. Sue, I went into an auction sale today and bought something. A glass block, about as big as your head.”

“Indeed,” Sue said.

Fessier, oblivious to feminine nuances, plunged on. “There was a little mannikin or something in the block. The reason I bought it—” He slowed and stopped.

“It looked at me,” Fessier said lamely. “It opened its beady little eyes and looked at me.”

“Of course it did,” Sue encouraged, pouring the man a drink. “Out of its beady little eyes, did it? This had better be good.”

Fessier got up and went out into the hall. He came back with a paper-wrapped parcel, about as large as Sue’s head. He sat down again, the bundle on his knees, and began to unwrap it.

“I was curious, that’s all,” he said. “Or . . . well, I was curious.”

“Maybe its beady little eyes hypnotized you into buying it,” Sue suggested, looking at him innocently over the rim of her glass.

Fessier’s hands stilled on the knots. “Yeah,” he said, and presently continued his task. There emerged a transparent cube, about nine inches to a side, with a mandrake embedded in the substance. At any rate, it looked like a mandrake, or what the Chinese call a ginseng root. It was roughly man-shaped, with well-defined limbs and head, but so brown and wrinkled that it might easily have been merely an oddly-shaped root. Its beady little eyes, however, were not open.

Sue said. “How much did you pay for that thing?”

“Oh, ten bucks.”

“Then you were hypnotized. Still, it’s unusual. Is it for me?”

Fessier said “No” very abruptly. The girl looked at him.

“Got another wench on your string? I know. She lives in a mausoleum. Instead of giving her flowers, you bring her nasty little—”

“Wait a minute.” Fessier said. “I think it’s going to open its eyes.”

Sue stared first at the block and then at Fessier. When nothing happened, she put out an exploratory hand, but Fessier shook his head warningly.

“Wait a minute, Sue. When I first saw the thing in that auctioneer’s, it was all dusty. I rubbed it. That’s when it opened its eyes. Then when I got it home, I rubbed it again.”

“Just like Aladdin, huh?” Sue said.

“It was talking to me,” Fessier murmured.

---

Night had begun to darken the city. Outside the windows grayness had turned into shadow. Electric signs were glowing in the distance, but they did not impinge: like the sounds that came up softly from the street below, they were impersonal. It is as easy to be alone in New York as it is in Montana, and that aloneness is somewhat less friendly. Perhaps that is because a great city is an extremely intricate, complicated social mechanism, and the moment one gets out of step with the machine, the immensity of the city makes itself sensed. It is overwhelming.

For the mandrake had opened its eyes. As Fessier had said, they were both small and beady.

When Sue became conscious of herself again, she thought that the creature had been talking for quite a while. It was purely telepathic, of course. Sound waves could not penetrate

that nearly impermeable block. She was surprised to find that she wasn't surprised.

“. . . but surprise and incredulity are the common human reactions,” it said. “Even a thousand years ago that was true. People of your race at that time said they believed in witches and werewolves, but that's a different matter from actually encountering a concrete example of the supernatural. I charted the neural reactions—the chain progressing from incredulity to credulity by the logical process of demonstrative empirical proof, and worked out a convenient short cut. It's been a long time since I wasted energy unnecessarily. Take it for granted that you're convinced. I did it with something you might call psychic radiation. I can influence emotion that way, but unfortunately mnemonic control is impossible for me. Your race is insatiably curious. Next will come the questions.”

“Next will come a drink,” Fessier said. “Sue, where did you put that bottle I brought up?”

“In the kitchen,” she said. “I'll get it.” But they went out together. Leaning against the sink, they looked at each other wide-eyed.

“The strange part is that I'm not a bit skeptical,” Fessier said. “That thing might as well be the law of gravitation for all the reaction I get.”

“But what is it?”

“I dunno. I just know it's . . . real. I'm convinced.”

“Psychic radiation.”

Fessier said quietly, “Are you afraid?”

The girl stared out the window. “Look, Sam. We believe in gravitation, too, but we don't lean out that window too far.”

“Uh. There are two things we can do. One is to go out the back door and never come back. The other—”

“If it can juggle psychic radiation like ping-pong balls, it could kill us or . . . or turn us into brass monkeys,” Sue remarked.

“Yeah. We *could* go out the back door, but I hate to think of our being chased down Lexington by a glass cube with a root in it. What am I standing here thinking for? Give me that.” Fessier took possession of the bottle and used it efficiently. After a few snorts, it seemed logical that they should return to their prize.

Fessier said, “W-what are you, anyhow?”

It said, “I told you the questions would come next. I know your race. Perpetually curious. Perhaps, some day—”

“Are you dangerous?”

“Many have blessed me. I am old. I am a legend. You spoke of the tale of Aladdin. I am the prototype of the jinni in the bottle. And the lamp, and the prophetic mandrake, and the homunculus, and the Sybil, and a hundred other talismans that have survived in your legends. But I am none of these. I am the super-iGlann.”

They stood before it, unconsciously holding hands. Sue said, “The what?”

“There was a race,” it said, “not a human race. In the early days, there were many mutations. The iGlann were intelligent, but their minds were constructed along different patterns from yours. They might have survived, but the Ice Age destroyed them. Now. Your science has its blind spots, because you are human, and have human restrictions. You have only binocular vision, for example, and only six senses.”

“Five,” Fessier said.

“Six. The iGlann had their own limitations. In some respects they were more advanced than your race, in others less. They tried to find a method of survival, and worked at creating a

life form that would be perfectly adaptable, perfectly invulnerable—and then changing their physical structure along such lines, so the Ice Age and other perils would not destroy them. Man can create a superman, usually by genetic accident. The iGlann created a super-iGlann. Then they died.”

---

“You’re a superman?” Sue asked. She was slightly lost.

“No. I am the super-iGlann. It is a different line. A superman would theoretically have no human limitations. But a . . . let us say . . . a superdog would. I am a super-iGlann, with none of the iGlann’s limitations; but there are things you can do that I cannot. Conversely, I am the legendary talisman, and I can grant your wishes.”

“I wish I could be skeptical,” Fessier said. “In fact, I am.”

“You are not skeptical about my existence. Only about my powers. If you expect me to conjure up a palace overnight, you will be disappointed. But if you want a palace, I can tell you the easiest way of getting one.”

Fessier said, “This is beginning to sound like ‘Acres of Diamonds.’ If you start telling me that pluck, luck and sweat will make me president, I’ll start hoping I’m dreaming. Even in a dream, I don’t like moralizing.”

“You have binocular vision and only six senses,” it said, “so you cannot visualize clearly the steps that lead up to a certain end. I can get, as it were, a bird’s-eye view of your world and what goes on in it. I can see what streams lead to what rivers. Do you want a palace?”

They both said no.

“What do you want?”

“I’m not sure we want anything,” Sue said. “Do we, dear? Fairy gold, remember.”

It said, “Human moralizing, founded on jealousy and the sour grapes philosophy. Look at it realistically. Is evil always punished? And I am not evil, in any human sense. I am too old even to consider the validity of such terms. I can give you what you want, but I have my limitations. My vitality is low. At times I must rest and recuperate.”

“Hibernation, you mean?” Fessier asked.

“It is not sleep,” the mandrake said. “Sleep is something I do not know—”

Fessier said, “Everybody wants success in his field, I suppose. If—”

“Study Picasso and the Cretan artifacts.” It named a few more art-forms and mentioned a book Fessier had never heard of.

“Oh. I thought so. Pluck, luck, and sweat.”

It said, “You have certain forces in you, and certain distinctive characteristics and talent. A spring can be analyzed qualitatively, but not by itself. I know what potentialities you have. Dam the spring at certain points, dig a new outlet, or let the spring erode it by itself. I told you I can’t build a palace overnight.”

Fessier was silent, but Sue leaned forward, her lips parted.

“Will . . . anybody be hurt by Sam’s actions?”

“Undoubtedly some will.”

She said, “I mean . . . somebody won’t die so Sam can step into his shoes?”

“Of course not. Probably fewer will be hurt by the altered course than if you had never met me. I believe one probability-likelihood is that eventually this man will contract a fatal disease and spread the contagion to dozens of others.”

“Ouch,” Fessier said. “Suppose I take your advice?”

“Then that won’t happen.”

“But something worse will?”

“I do not think so . . . no. From your viewpoint, the indications are that the results will be better for everyone concerned.” And there was the whisper of a thought that said, “Even I.”

Sue was following her own ideas. “Can I get in on this? I’d like to make a success out of my career.”

“All I can do is show you how to avoid some of the natural obstacles that would ordinarily thwart you. Go to Chez Coq at ten next Wednesday night and wear a green hat.”

“Is that all?”

“No. Get drunk. Now I must rest.”

It closed its eyes and rested.

---

It had been to world beyond world. Time varied in various continua, and it could not tell now how many years or centuries or millennia had passed since the iGlann first gave it life. In the block it lay quiescent, to the human gaze. But it was not in the block. The block was merely the three-dimensional window through which it could gaze into the world it had first known.

A small, strange thing, less than a foot high, brown and wrinkled as a root, and as immobile. It rested, watching and waiting wearily.

---

But Fessier was reading an old book, and studying Picasso, Cretan art, and other matters. Thursday evening he was in his own apartment when the buzzer sounded and he got up to let Sue Daley in. She was pink and gay.

“Keep your fingers crossed,” she said. “I’ve got an awful hangover, but it’s been worth it. Where were you today? I phoned.”

“Up at the Met.,” Fessier told her, putting out his cigarette. “I was making some sketches. What happened?”

Sue sat down and touched a book lying on a coffee table near her, a small volume with dozens of scraps of paper sticking out of it. “Is this . . . oh. Where’s our talisman?”

“I locked it away in a closet. It’s still asleep.”

“It doesn’t sleep,” Sue said. “Remember? Anyway, I wanted to tell you what happened last night.”

“Maybe you’d better. Since you wouldn’t let me go along.” Fessier sounded faintly jealous.

“It’s just as well. I met a man. A funny little fat man who’s incredibly sentimental.”

“Uh-huh. And is he going to give you a million dollars?”

“Not quite,” Sue said. “He was drunk as a lord. So was I, or I wouldn’t have talked to him. He came over to my table and introduced himself. It seems he liked my hat—the green one. It’s a symbol to him. Back in the Twenties, Arlen’s ‘Green Hat’ was the fashion, and his wife was wearing one when he met her. They’re divorced now, but Tubby practically carries around a bucket to cry into when he remembers the good old days.”

“Tubby?”

“I can’t help it,” Sue said, gurgling. “He is. Very. His name’s Robert Cowan Cook, and he’s just bought into some business that does things with chemicals. Ink eradicator or something. It’s all much too complicated, but Tubby wants to open an advertising account for his new firm, and when he found out I was in that business, he decided I was Heaven’s

blessing to Robert Cowan Cook. He saw the boss today, and I gather something's going to come of it."

"Swell," Fessier said, in a markedly half-hearted tone. Sue hastily got up and kissed him.

"Oh, Sam. Don't act that way."

"I know," he said, relaxing into a grin. "You'll become rich and famous, and I'll have to marry you for your money."

"Well, won't you?"

"Sure. But I'd rather—"

"You'll be rich and famous, too. Remember? What are we talking about?" Sue ended. "It's all coincidence. It must be."

Fessier made marks on a sketch pad with a charcoal pencil. "I suppose so. I believe in our . . . little critter, but not in his good works. Not yet. He forgot to convince me about those."

"Maybe he couldn't. He's limited, you know."

"Poor old fellow," Sue said. "He'd be hell on wheels with the iGlanns, but he *is* handicapped here. Humans must seem strange to him."

"Everything human is alien—to him." Fessier drew a curve, rubbed it out, and tried again. Sue craned.

"What's that? Oh." She squinted. "Something new?"

"I don't know. I've been getting some ideas. That book our talisman recommended—"

"Is this it? 'Tristram Shandy.' I never read it."

"Neither did I," Fessier said. "It's a curious book. The author wrote it just the way he wanted to. He had a cockeyed sort of view of the world. It's . . . funny."

He got up abruptly, unlocked a closet, and took out the transparent cube. He placed it on the coffee table.

Sue said, "He . . . it's asleep."

"You said it couldn't sleep."

"Well, it's resting."

Fessier rubbed the cube. The mannikin didn't stir.

After a while he said, "Pluck, luck, and sweat eh? O.K. I'll respect the DO NOT DISTURB sign."

The super-iGlann went back into the closet—for a while.

---

Tubby, or Robert Cowan Cook, took a great, though platonic, interest in Sue. The girl saw to that. Cook Chemicals, Inc., was a new firm, and needed advertising. Tubby had decided that Sue was the only one who could carry out his ideas, and so he had insisted that she be put in complete charge of his campaign. This irritated Sue's boss, but the account was too big to be lost through lack of diplomacy. Besides, he thought he could keep Sue in line.

But he couldn't. Sue planned her campaign along unorthodox lines, working out ideas that had built up in her scrapbook for years. She had an excellent mind for advertising, and, given a free hand, she did things that made her boss long to be twenty years younger so he could tear his hair. Robert Cowan Cook beamed, approved everything Sue did, and felt his business acumen justified when the response made itself known. Sue Daley was obviously going places, and realized that when other agencies began to bid for her services.

And Sam Fessier had begun to find his way, too. There was always a small, uneasy, nagging doubt inside him, intensified when he looked at what he kept in his closet, but a publisher wanted to make a book of his collected cartoons. Not his early ones, and there



weren't enough of the new ones yet to fill a volume, but he had no difficulty in turning them out. He had established a new *genre*.

Neither the drawing or the caption alone could have accounted for the humor factor in Fessier's cartoons. His drawings and the ideas behind them were singularly funny. He had developed a new viewpoint, and found a new way of expressing it, both in line and in caption. It was derivative, of course, but the result was a synthesis that was peculiarly Fessier's own. It was not Tristram Shandy's viewpoint, but that of Tristram Shandy mingled with Fessier's, emerging in a cockeyed style of line drawing that made people laugh. Humor has its formulae. The spring had found a new outlet, and Fessier had discovered the right vehicle for his mind and the creative energy in it.

---

Six months later Fessier threw a party. He and Sue were getting married the next day, and this presupposed quite a binge. His apartment wasn't large enough, so they used Tubby's, and within two hours everyone was joyously tight. Fessier found himself with a wild-eyed chemist who worked for Cook Chemicals, Inc.

"Perfect solvent," said the chemist, whose name was MacIntyre. "Dissolves everything. Meaningless, meaningless."

Fessier, wet-nursing a highball on his knee, tried to look solemn. "Why?"

"Impractical. Not my job to think up a use for it. Plugging that new stink-remover Keister worked out. Heavy advertising for that. Don't want to release anything new to compete with it. Told me to wait. I got it patented, though. I mean the company did. Perfect solvent."

"It dissolves everything?" Fessier inquired.

"You're crazy," MacIntyre said, shocked. "What could you keep a perfect solvent in? Perfect solvent for some materials, I said. Clean, quick, accurate. Lots of uses. Pour it on. *Pffffst!* Gone."

"I don't believe it," Fessier said.

---

They ended in MacIntyre's laboratory in the Cook works at Long Island. Perhaps Fessier wouldn't have walked out on the party if a movie actor, who was present, hadn't been rushing Sue violently. As it was, Fessier decided that Sue would be sorry when she found him dead, and went unsteadily to Long Island with the argumentative chemist. There was one disadvantage, they found. The laboratory had MacIntyre's solvent in it, and plenty of other materials, but no liquor at all. The next logical step was obvious. Fessier forgot about the party and headed like a homing bird for his own apartment, trailing MacIntyre.

"Perfect solvent for some things, anyhow," MacIntyre insisted, spoiling Fessier's coffee table by spilling some of the magic liquid on it. "There, see? It eats right through."

"Didn't hurt the metal, though," Fessier said.

"You're crazy. No such thing as a perfect solvent. What would you keep the stuff in?"

"A perfect insolvent," Fessier suggested, "I was, six months ago. All I had to do was change my name to Aladdin. Why not call your stuff Aladdin Mixture?"

"That's a lousy idea," MacIntyre said disgustedly. "A very lousy idea." He got up and wandered around, spilling his perfect solvent here and there.

Fessier was feeling very sorry for himself and wanted to talk. He told MacIntyre all about the mandrake. MacIntyre was worse than skeptical; he was disinterested. "I only said it was perfect for some things," he explained. "Silicon, too. See? *Pffffst!*"

"But—"

“Gone. Oops. Maybe you needed that window, after all. Catch me.”

Fessier was opening the closet, and MacIntyre managed to recover his balance through his own efforts. The transparent block came out and was exhibited on the damaged coffee table.

“Go on, convince this dumb lug,” Fessier urged. “Wake up, pal.”

Nothing happened. Fessier disgustedly took another drink. After a time he was surprised to find himself sitting at the other end of the room, not quite awake, watching MacIntyre examine the crystal block.

The chemist poured some of his perfect solvent on it.

Sobriety suddenly chilled Fessier. He jumped up, staggered, oriented himself, and sprang at MacIntyre. He pushed the man violently away. MacIntyre sat down on the couch, holding an empty metal vial in his hand, looking surprised. “I couldn’t help it!” he was saying dazedly.

“No,” Fessier said thickly. “No. *No!*”

The transparent substance around the mannikin was melting away. The solvent was swiftly eating through, working down to the gnarled little root-figure that stood motionless in the block. It was no longer a block, however. It was a jagged, irregular stone, crumbling and crumbling.

And then it began to build up again.

Facet by shining facet, crystal grew around the mannikin. It didn’t take long. The glittering translucence shimmered and faded, and the original transparent block stood on the coffee table, apparently unchanged, the mandrake figure fixed within it.

On the tiny, wizened face was—rage. Incandescent rage that made the little eyes hot crimson for a moment. The red glance swept from the unsteady MacIntyre to Fessier, and then to MacIntyre again. The rage flickered and faded. The small eyes dulled; the mandrake body went passive that had for a moment seemed to quiver with a dreadful aliveness.

The thought of the super-iGlann moved sluggishly through Fessier’s mind. “Failure,” was that thought. “Failure again. It will have to be quicker than that, when the time comes again. Unless I am destroyed very fast, before I have time to adapt, I cannot be destroyed at all.”

There was another thought after that, slow and calmer than before. “You may forget,” it said. “You have failed me, but I grant you forgetfulness.”

---

Petronius tells of a Sybilline oracle kept in a glass bottle. She was very, very old. When the schoolboys of that time gathered around and rapped on the bottle, they would ask, “Sybil, what wouldst thou?” And the Sybil answered, “I would die.”

The super-iGlann was a racial failure. The iGlann had made it invulnerable and adaptable in the highest degree they knew, but the iGlann were not homo sapiens. They could not give it powers they did not possess themselves. They could give it only intensifications of their own talents.

They were not imaginative. They were not creatively intelligent. And perhaps, subconsciously, they died because they did not want to find a way to live. No one will ever know that.

In the super-iGlann’s unconscious mind was firmly fixed the instinct for self-preservation, a trigger reaction that would enable it to use its adaptability in the face of personal danger. *In spite of itself—*

It was old, this withered little brown mandrake root, and it could not create, even in its own mind. It would die. In other continua to which it had access, and through Earth’s history,

it had sought a weapon it could turn against itself. It could not sleep. The Sybil in the bottle was very, very old.

But its powers were limited. Among iGlann it might have turned that exotic race to its own purposes, but it was not superhuman. It could only chart the probabilities of human progress, and try to place itself in a position where a weapon would strike at it.

And it had tried. Time after endless time it had tried. All created things it had tried. Now it sought the new, and sought it deviously, among the devious paths of human relationship. The web it had woven for Sue and Fessier was only one of many webs, each separate thread anchored carefully to some point of apparent inconsequence. But when the web was complete, then a tug at the outermost edge set the whole structure quivering and the pattern rose clearly out of its tangle—

Sue must wear a green hat and write outrageous copy and borrow Tubby Cook's apartment for a party. Fessier must strike a perfect balance that his work might put him on a financial parallel with Sue's work, for without that equality the betrothal party could never have been. Fessier would not marry a woman more successful than himself. Fessier must be present to meet MacIntyre, and so must the movie actor be present, to drive Fessier out. And the end and purpose of all this devious contriving was—

Failure again.

Long ago the contriving had ceased to have value as amusement. Long ago, when those who were puppets to the super-iGlann's manipulations still wore skin cloaks and woad, or carried bronze eagles along the roads of Rome. But the puppets went on, and the super-iGlann went on, and the end was not yet.

For the seed was too deep in the unconscious mind that controlled that mandrake body, and could not control its own dark places. The action was pure reflex that set up an adaptive defense against whatever weapon was turned against it. A man may wish to commit suicide, but shrink instinctively from the knife's edge. And the super-iGlann's reaction was far more efficient than that.

It could invent no effective weapon for suicide, because it was not creative. It could only wait, while men studied and worked out their technologies—and when a new death was to be found, the little brown rootlet made deviously certain it would be in the path of that destruction.

By now the effort in itself was reflex that sent the crystal block which was a window into new nuclei of death. World after world it had tried, and returned at last as it must always return to press as close as it could come against this window into the world the iGlann once knew. Here, if anywhere—it had told itself time after time. Here, if anywhere—

A flicker of a new scheme began to move through the timeless mind of the super-iGlann. Somewhere, the hope of a new doorway to success began to glimmer. And if that, too, failed

---

The spring flowed on without ceasing. It could not make basic changes, but it could alter a little, here and there, through one Aladdin or another, so that new channels were opened, so that it might sometime, somehow, somewhere, cease to be.

---

They had been married for a week. Sue leaned on the parapet of the roof garden and said, "This is better than taking a trip. I mean, we can fix up our honeymoon to suit ourselves, right here in New York."

Fessier put his arm about her. “Sure. But it’s only a rain check. We’ll take a real honeymoon later, when your work lets up. Just the same, some day you’re going to quit your job.”

She smiled at the night. “Oh, let me be a career woman for a while longer. There’s no hurry about a rain check.”

“Of course not,” he said. He put his hands on her shoulders and kissed her gently. “No hurry at all. We’ve always got our talisman, anyhow.”

Sue frowned a little. “Oh. We don’t, any more. Didn’t I tell you?”

Fessier said, “Eh? What do you mean, Sue?”

“I shipped it off today to some museum. As a gift.”

“You . . . did what? Shipped off the—”

She opened her mouth. “I . . . oh, Sam! I must be insane! I sent it away—gave it away . . . I *couldn’t* have!”

Fessier said quietly, “It’s all right, darling. But tell me just what happened.”

“I don’t know. I mean, I do know, but I’m just realizing now how crazy I was. I looked up a museum in the library, wrapped up the . . . our talisman, and mailed it there. But—I don’t know why I did it!”

Fessier said, “Maybe you were hypnotized. What museum was it?”

She came closer, shivering, and they stood together there between the ancient incandescence of the stars and the fragile lights of the city below. “I’d never heard of it before,” she said. “Some museum in Japan. Is there a place called Hiroshima?”

THE END.

[The end of *Rain Check* by Henry Kuttner (as Lewis Padgett)]