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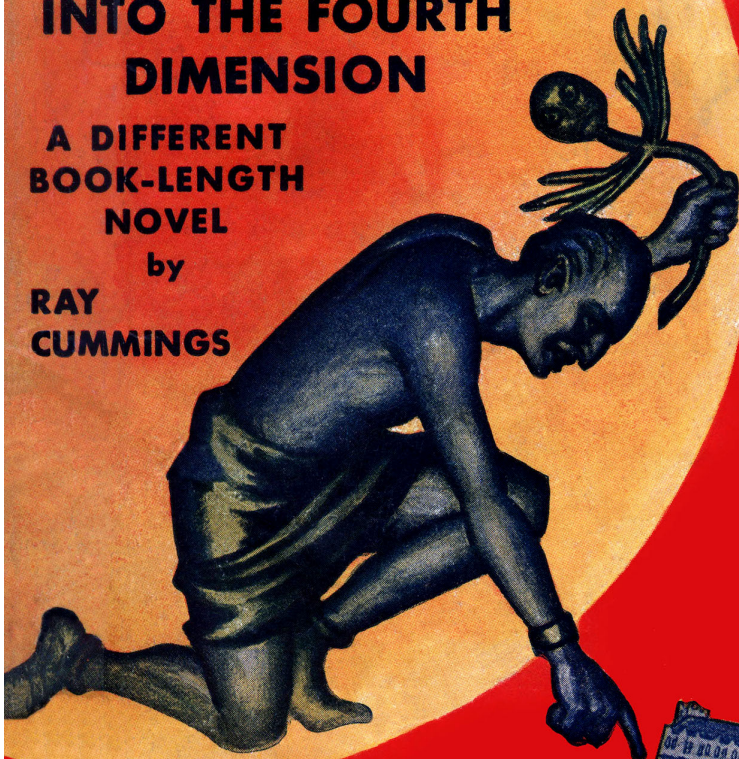
QUARTERLY

**INTO THE FOURTH
DIMENSION**

**A DIFFERENT
BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL**

by

**RAY
CUMMINGS**



also

S. D. GOTTESMAN

LEE GREGOR

HUGH RAYMOND

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INTO THE FOURTH DIMENSION

By RAY CUMMINGS

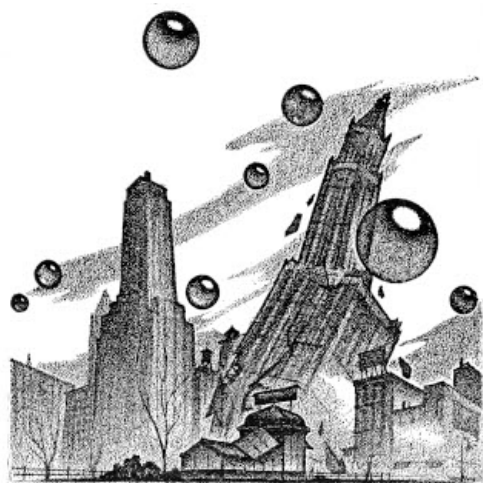
Are there other worlds existing side by side with ours, yet unseen and unsuspected? Here is the incredible tale of three who went through the wall that bars the way to this shadowy realm and found a strange land, a stranger people, and a fantastic enemy.

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from Science Fiction Quarterly Winter 1941-1942. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

**IN RESPONSE TO THE MANY REQUESTS WE HAVE
RECEIVED, WE ARE
REPRINTING THIS FAMOUS NOVEL—ONE OF THE
MOST UNUSUAL EVER
CONCEIVED BY A SCIENCE FICTION AUTHOR.**

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CHAPTER I

THE GHOSTS OF '46

The first of the "ghosts" made its appearance in February of 1946. It was seen just after nightfall near the bank of a little stream known as Otter Creek, a few miles from Rutland, Vermont. There are willows along the creek-bank at this point. Heavy snow was on the ground. A farmer's wife saw the ghost standing beside the trunk of a tree. The evening was rather dark. Clouds obscured the stars and the moon. A shaft of yellow light from the farmhouse windows came out over the snow; but the ghost was in a patch of deep shadow. It seemed to be the figure of a man standing with folded arms, a shoulder against the tree-trunk. It was white and shimmering; it glowed; its outlines were wavy and blurred. The farmer's wife screamed and rushed back into the house.

Up to this point the incident was not unusual. It would have merited no more than the briefest and most local newspaper attention; reported perhaps to some organization interested in psychical research to be filed with countless others of its kind. But when the farmer's wife got back to the house and told her husband what she had seen, the farmer went out and saw it also; and with him, his two grown sons and his daughter. There was no doubt about it; they all saw the apparition still standing motionless exactly where the woman had said.

There was a telephone in the farmhouse. They telephoned their nearest neighbors. The telephone girl got the news. Soon it had spread to the village of Procter; and then to Rutland itself. The ghost did not move. By ten o'clock that evening the

road before the farmer's house was crowded with cars; a hundred or more people were trampling the snow of his corn-field cautiously, from a safe distance regarding that white motionless figure.

It chanced that I was also an eyewitness to this, the first of the ghosts of '46. My name is Robert Manse. I was twenty-six years old that winter—correspondent in the New York office of a Latin-American export house. With Wilton Grant and his sister Beatrice—whom I counted the closest of my few real friends—I was in Rutland that Saturday evening. Will was a chemist; some business which he had not detailed to me had called him to Vermont from his home near New York. In spite of the snowy roads he had wanted to drive up, and had invited me to go along. We were dining in the Rutland Hotel when people began talking of this ghost out toward Procter.

It was about ten-thirty when we arrived at the farm. Cars were lined along the road in both directions. People trampling the road, the fields, clustering about the farmhouse; talking, shouting to one another.

The field itself was jammed, but down by the willows along the creek there was a segment of snow as yet untrampled, for the crowd had dared approach so far but no farther. Even at this distance we could see the vague white blot of the apparition. Will said, "Come on, let's get down nearer. You want to go, Bee?"

"Yes," she said.

We began elbowing and shoving our way through the crowd. It was snowing again now. Dark; but some of the people had flashlights which darted about; and occasionally a smoker's match would flare. The crowd was good-natured; with

courage bolstered by its numbers, the awe of the supernatural was gone. But they all kept at a safe distance.

Somebody said, "Why don't they shoot at it? It won't move—can't they make it move?"

"It does move—I saw it move, it turned its head. They're going up to it pretty soon—see what it is."

I asked a man, "Has it made any sound?"

"No," he said. "They claim it moaned, but it didn't. The police are there now, I think—and they're going to shoot at it. I don't see what they're afraid of. If they wanted me to I'd walk right up to it." He began elbowing his way back toward the road.

We found ourselves presently at the front rank, where the people were struggling to keep themselves from being shoved forward by those behind them. Thirty feet across the empty snow was the ghost. It seemed, as they had said, the figure of a man, blurred and quivering as though moulded of a heavy white mist at every instant about to dissipate. I stared, intent upon remembering what I was seeing. Yet it was difficult. With a quick look the imagination seemed to picture the tall lean figure of a man with folded arms, meditatively leaning against the tree-trunk. But like a faint star which vanishes when one stares at it, I could not see a single detail. The clothes, the face, the very outlines of the body itself seemed to quiver and elude my sight when I concentrated my attention upon them.

Yet the figure, motionless, was there. Half a thousand people were now watching it. Bee said, "See its shoulder, Rob! It isn't touching the tree—it's inside the tree! It's leaning against something else, inside the tree!"

The dark outline of the tree-trunk was steady reality; it did seem as though that shadowy shoulder were within the tree.

A farmer's boy beside us had a handful of horseshoes. He began throwing them. One of them visibly went through the ghost. Then a man with a star on the lapel of his overcoat fired a shot. It spat yellow flame. Where the bullet went no one could have told, save that it hit the water of the creek. The specter was unchanged.

The crowd was murmuring. A man near us said, "I'll walk up to it. Who wants to go along?"

"I'll go," said Will unexpectedly; but Bee held him back.

The volunteer demanded, "Officer, may I go?"

"I ain't stoppin' you," said the man with the star. He retreated a few steps, waving his weapon.

"Well then put that gun away. It might go off while I'm down there."

Somebody handed the man a broken chunk of plank. He started slowly off. Others cautiously followed behind him. One was waving a broom. A woman shouted shrilly, "That's right—sweep it away—we don't want it here." A laugh went up, but it was a high-pitched, nervous laugh.

The man with the plank continued to advance. He called belligerently, "Get out of there, you! We see you—get away from there!" Then abruptly he leaped forward. His waving

plank swept through the ghost; as he lunged, his own body went within its glow. A panic seemed to descend upon him. He whirled, flailing his arms, kicking, striking at the empty air as one tries to fight off the attack of a vicious wasp. Panting, he stumbled backward over his plank, gathered himself and retreated.

The white apparition was unchanged. "It was just like a glow of white light," the attacker told us later. "I could see it—but couldn't feel it. Not a thing—there wasn't anything there!"

The ghost had not moved, though some said that it turned its head a trifle. Then from the crowd came a man with a powerful light. He flooded it on the specter. Its outlines dimmed, but we could still see it. A shout went up. "Turn that light off! It's moving! It's moving away!"

It was moving. Floating or walking? I could not have told. Bee said that distinctly she saw its legs moving as it walked. It seemed to turn; and slowly, hastelessly it retreated. Moving back from us. As though the willows, the creek-bank, the creek itself were not there, it moved backward. The crowd, emboldened, closed in. At the water's edge we stood. The figure apparently was now within or behind the water. It seemed to stalk down some invisible slope. Occasionally it turned aside as though to avoid some obstruction. It grew smaller, dimmer by its greater distance from us until it might have been the mere reflection of a star down there in the water of the creek; then it blinked, and vanished.

There were thousands who watched for that ghost the following night, but it did not appear. The affair naturally was the subject of widespread newspaper comment; but when after a few days no one else had seen the ghost, the

newspapers began turning from the serious to the jocular angle.

Then, early in March, the second ghost was reported. In the Eastern Hemisphere this time. It was discovered in midair, near the Boro Badur, in Java. Thousands of people watched it for over an hour that evening. It was the figure of a man, seated on something invisible in the air nearly a hundred feet above the ground. It sat motionless as though contemplating the crowd of watchers beneath it. And then it was joined by other figures! Another man, and a woman. The reports naturally were confused, contradictory. But they agreed in general that the other figures came from the dimness of distance; came walking up some invisible slope until they met the seated figure. Like a soundless motion picture projected into the air, the crowd on the ground saw the three figures in movement; saw them—the reports said—conversing; saw them at last move slowly backward and downward within the solid outlines of the great temple, until finally in the distance they disappeared.

Another apparition was seen in Nome; another in Cape Town. From everywhere they were now reported. Some by daylight, but most at night. By May the newspapers featured nothing else. Psychological research societies sprang into unprecedented prominence and volubility. Learned men of spiritualistic tendencies wrote reams of ponderous essays which the newspapers eagerly printed.

Amid the reports now, the true from the false became increasingly difficult to distinguish. Notoriety seekers, cranks,

and quacks of every sort burst into print with weird tales of ghostly manifestations. Hysterical young girls, morbidly seeking publicity, told strange tales which in more sober days no newspaper would have dared to print. And in every country charlatans were doing a thriving business with the trappings of spiritualism.

In late July the thing took another turn. A new era began—a sinister era which showed the necessity for something more than all this aimless talk. Four men were walking one night along a quiet country road near a small English village. They were men of maturity, reputable, sober, middle-aged citizens. Upon the road level they observed the specters of four or five male figures, which instead of remaining motionless rushed forward to the attack. These ghosts were ponderable! The men distinctly felt them; a vague feeling, indescribable, perhaps as though something soft had brushed them. The fight, if such it could be called, amounted to nothing. The men flailed their arms in sudden fear; and the apparitions sped away. Greenish, more solid-looking than those heretofore seen.

This was more than mere visibility—an actual encounter. These four men were of the type who could be believed. The report was reliable. And the next night, in a Kansas farmhouse, the farmer and his wife were awakened by the scream of their adolescent daughter. They rushed into her bedroom. She was in bed, and bending over her was the apparition of a man. Its fingers were holding a lock of the girl's long black hair. At the farmer's shout, the ghost turned; its hand was raised—and the farmer and his wife both saw that the shadowy fingers had lifted the girl's tresses which they were clutching. Then it dropped them and moved away,

not through the walls of the room, but out through the open window.

The girl was dead. She had suffered from heart trouble; was dead of fright, undoubtedly. It was the beginning of the era of menace. And that next afternoon Wilton Grant telephoned me. His voice had a strange tenseness to it, though it was grave and melodious as always.

"Come out and see us this evening, will you, Rob?"

"Why, yes," I said. I had not seen them for over a month—an estrangement which I had not understood and which hurt me had fallen between us. "Of course I will," I added. "How's Bee?"

"She's been quite ill.... No, not dangerous, she's better now. Don't fail us, Rob. About eight o'clock.... That's fine. We—I need you. You've been a mighty good friend, letting us treat you the way we have—"

He hung up. With an ominous sense of danger hanging over me, I went out to see them at the hour he had named.

CHAPTER II

GROPING AT THE UNKNOWN

Wilton Grant was at that time just under forty. He was a tall, spare man of muscular build, lean but not powerful. His smooth-shaven face was large-featured, rough-hewn, with a shock of brown hair above it—hair turning grey at the temples. Beneath heavy brows his grey eyes were deep-set, somber. His ruddy-brown complexion, the obvious strength of his frame at a quick glance gave him an out-of-doors look; a woodsman cast in the mould of a gentleman. Yet there was something poetic about him as well; that wavy, unruly hair, the brooding quality of his eyes. When he spoke, those eyes frequently twinkled with the good nature characteristic of him. But in repose, the somberness was there, unmistakable; an unvoiced, brooding melancholy.

Yet there was nothing morbid about Wilton Grant. A wholesomeness, mental and physical, radiated from him. He was a jolly companion, a man of intellectuality and culture. His deep voice had a pleasing resonance suggestive of the public speaker. Normally rather silent, chary of speech, he could upon occasion draw fluently from a vocabulary of which many an orator would be proud.

He was a bachelor. I often wondered why, for he seemed of a type that would be immensely attractive to women. He did not avoid them; the pose of a woman-hater would have been abhorrent to him. Yet no woman to my knowledge had ever interested him, even mildly. Except his sister. They were orphans and she was his constant companion. They were both

in fact, rather chary of friends; absorbed in their work, in which she took an active part. Their home and laboratory was an unpretentious frame cottage in a Westchester village of suburban New York. They lived quietly, modestly, with only one automobile, and no 'plane.

Will opened the door for me himself, smiling as he extended his big, hearty hand. "Well! You came, Rob? You're very forgiving—that's the mark of a true friend." He led me into the old-fashioned sitting room. "I'm not going to apologize—" "Don't," I said. "I knew of course you had some reason—"

We were seated. He said with a nod, "Yes. A reason—you'll hear it now—tonight—"

His voice trailed away. It made my heart beat faster. He had changed. I saw him suddenly older.

"Where's Bee?" I asked out of the silence.

He jerked himself back from his reverie. "Upstairs. She'll be down in a moment. She's been ill, Rob."

"But you said not seriously."

"No. She's better now. It's been largely mental—she's been frightened, Rob. A terrible strain—that's why I thought it better for us to isolate ourselves for a while—"

"Oh, then that's why—"

"That's why I wrote you so peremptorily not to come to see us any more. I was upset myself, I needn't have been so crude—"

"Please don't apologize, Will. I—I didn't understand, but—"

"I'm not. I'm just telling you. But now Bee thought we should have you with us. Our best friend, you understand? And it

will make things easier for her—naturally she's frightened—"

My hand went to his arm. What I had meant to say I do not know, for Bee at that moment entered the room. A girl of twenty-four. Tall, slim and graceful.

She was dressed now in a clinging negligee which seemed to accentuate the slim grace of her. But the marks of illness were plain upon her face; a pallor; her eyes, though they smiled at me with the smile of greeting upon her lips, had the light of fear in them; her hand as I took it was chill, and its fingers felt thin and wan.

"Bee!"

"It's good to see you, Rob. Will has been apologizing for us, I suppose—"

These friends of mine calling me to them in their hour of need. I had been annoyed, hurt; I had not realized how deep was my affection for them ... for Bee.... Vaguely I wondered now if their trouble—this fear that lay so obviously upon them both—concerned the coming of the ghosts....

Bee sat close beside me, as though by my nearness she felt a measure of protection.

Will faced us. For a moment he was silent. Then he began, "I have a good deal to say, Rob—I want to be brief—"

I interrupted impulsively, "Just tell me this. Does it, this thing, whatever it is—does it concern the ghosts?"

I was aware of a shudder that ran over Bee. Will did not move. "Yes," he said. "It does. And these ghosts have changed. We knew they would—we've been expecting it."

"That poor girl," Bee said softly. "Dead—dead in her bed of fright. You read about it, Rob?"

"A menace," Will went on. "The world is just realizing it now. Ghosts, changing from shadow to substance—" He stopped, then added abruptly, "We've never told you much about our work—our business—have we?"

They had in truth always been reticent. I had never been in their laboratory. They were engaged, I understood, chiefly with soil analysis; sometimes people would come out to consult them. Beyond such a meager idea I knew nothing about it.

Will said abruptly, "Our real work we have never told anyone. It concerns—well, a research into realms of chemistry and physics unknown. I have been delving into it for nearly ten years, and then Bee grew old enough to help me. We've made progress—" His smile was very queer. "Tonight—I'm ready to show you something that I can do."

They seemed to torture Bee, these words of her brother's. I heard the sharp intake of her breath, saw her white fingers locked tensely in her lap.

"Not—not tonight, Will."

"Tonight—as good a night as any other.... Rob, would it surprise you to know we anticipated the coming of the ghosts years ago? Not that they would come, but the possibility of it. Ghosts! What do you think they are, Rob?"

"Why ghosts—ghosts are—"

"Spirits of the dead made visible?" His manner was suddenly vehement; his tone contemptuous. "Earth-bound spirits! Astral bodies housing souls whose human bodies are in their graves! Rubbish! These are not that sort of ghosts."

I stammered, "But then—what are they?"

"Call them ghosts, the word is as good as any other." His voice grew calmer; he went on earnestly, "I want you to understand me—it's necessary—and yet I must not be too technical with you. Let me ask you this—you'll see in a moment that none of this is irrelevant. How many dimensions has a point?"

At my puzzled look he smiled. "I'd better not question you, Rob, but you won't find me hard to understand. A point—an infinitesimal point in space—has no dimension. It has only location. That's clear, isn't it? A line has one dimension—length. A plane surface has length and breadth; a cube, length, breadth and thickness. The world of the cube, Rob, is the world we think we live in—the world of three dimensions. You've heard of that intangible something they call the fourth dimension? We think it does not concern us—but it does. We ourselves have four dimensions. We are the world of the fourth dimension. But the fourth is not so readily understood as the other three."

He paused for an instant, then added, "The fourth dimension is time, Rob. Not a new conception to scientists—think a moment—how would you define time?"

"Time," I said, "Well, I read somewhere that time is what keeps everything from happening at once."

He did not smile. "Quite so. It is something in the universe of our consciousness along which we progress in measured rate from birth to death—from the beginning to the end.

"We are living in a four-dimensional world—a world of length, breadth, thickness and time. The first three, to our human perception, have always been linked together. Time—I do not know why—seems to our minds something essentially different. Yet it is not. Our universe is a blending of all four.

"Let me give you an example. That book there on the table—it exists because it has length, breadth and thickness. But Rob, it also has duration. It is matter, persisting both in space and in time. You see how the element time is involved? I'll go further. We know that two material bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. With three of the dimensions only—that is, if theoretically we remove the identical time-factor—they do not conflict. You're confused, Rob?"

"I'm not quite sure what you're aiming at," I said.

"You'll understand in a moment. Matter, as we know it, is merely a question of vibration. It is, isn't it?"

"I know light is vibration," I responded. "And sound. And heat, and—"

He interrupted me. "The very essence of matter is vibration. Do you know of what matter is composed? What is the fundamental substance? Let us see. First, we find matter is composed only of molecules. They are substances, vibrating in space. But of what are molecules composed? Atoms, vibrating in space. Atoms are substance. Of what are they composed?"

"Electrons?" I said dubiously.

"Protons and rings of electrons. Let us cling to substance, Rob. These electrons are merely negative, disembodied electricity—not matter, but mere vibration. They—these electrons—revolve around a central, positive nucleus. This then, is all the substance that matter has. But when you penetrate this inner nucleus, what do you find? Substance? Not at all. This proton, as they sometimes term it, this last inner strong-hold of substance, is itself a mere vortex—a whirlpool in space!"

I groped at the thought. Matter, substance, everything tangible in my whole conscious universe, robbed of its entity, reduced to mere vibration in empty space. Vibration of what?

"It's appalling, Rob, the unreality of everything. Metaphysicians say that nothing exists save in the perception of it by our human senses.... I was talking of the dimension, time. It is the indispensable factor of vibration. That's obvious. Motion is nothing but the simultaneous change of matter in space and time. You see how blended all the factors are? You cannot deal with one without the others. And mark you this, Rob—you can subdivide matter until it becomes a mere vortex in empty space. Can you wonder then—"

I had noticed Bee gazing intently across the room. "Will!" she said suddenly; her voice was hardly more than a whisper. "It's there now, Will!"

The room was brightly illuminated by a cluster of globes near the ceiling. Will left his seat, calmly, unhurried, and switched them off. There was only the small table light left. It cast a

yellow circle of light downward; most of the room was in shadow. And over in a corner I saw the glowing apparition of a recumbent man no more than ten feet from us.

Will said, "Come here, Rob—let me show you this." His voice was grave and unflurried. As I crossed the room hesitatingly, Bee was with me, forcing herself to calmness. She said, "It's here most of the time. Watching us! It seems to be on guard—always watching—"

Will drew me beside him. Together we stood within a foot of the spectre. It took my courage, but after a moment the grewsome element seemed to leave me for Will stood as though the thing were a museum specimen, explaining it.

I saw, so far as I can put the sight into words, the vibrating white shape of a man reclining on one elbow. It was slightly below the level of the floor, most of it within or behind the floor, the outlines of which were plainer than the apparition mingled with them. The head and shoulders were raised about to the level of our ankles.

A man? I could not call it that. Yet there was a face which after a moment I could have sworn was human-featured; I could almost think I saw its eyes, staring at me intently.

Will stooped down and passed his hand slowly through the face. "You can feel nothing. It has visibility—that property only in common with us. Try it."

I forced my hand down to the thing, held it there. It was like putting one's fingers into a dim area of light.

"Is it—it is alive?" I asked.

"Alive?" Will's tone was grim. "That depends on what you mean by alive. It can reason, if that answers you."

"I mean—can it move?"

"It moves," said Bee. "It watches us—follows us—" She shuddered.

The details of the figure? I stepped back to see it better. It seemed now a man clothed in normal garments ... a malevolent face, with eyes watching me.... Was that face my imagination, or did I really see it?

I must have stammered my thoughts aloud, for Will said, "What we see, and what really exists, has puzzled metaphysicians for centuries. Who knows what this thing really looks like? You do not, nor do I. Our minds are capable of visualizing things only within the limits of an accustomed mould. You see that thing as a man of fairly human aspect, and so do I. The details are elusive; but stare at them for a day and your imagination will supply them all. That's what you do in infancy with the whole material world about you—mould it to fit our human perceptions. But what everything really looks like—who can tell?"

"Can it—can it hear us?" I demanded.

"No—I do not think so. It can see us, no more. And it has no fear." With a belligerent gesture he added humorously, "Get up, you, or I'll wring your neck!"

"Will, don't joke like that!" Bee protested.

He turned away and switched on the main lights. I could still see the thing there, but now it was paler—wan like starlight

before the coming dawn. Will turned his back on it and sat down. His face had gone solemn again.

"These things are materializing, Rob. They have become a menace. That's why what I'm planning to do should be done at once.... Bee! Will you please not interrupt me!" It was the first time I had ever heard his tone turn sharp with her, and I realized then the strain he was under. "Rob, listen to me. Science has given me the power to do what I'm planning, but we won't discuss that now. Call this anything you like. What I want you to know is—there is another realm about us into which—under given conditions—our consciousness can penetrate. Call it the Unknown. The realm of Unthought Things. A material world? I've shown you, Rob, that nothing is substance if you go to the inside of it."

Dimly I was groping at a hundred will-o'-the-wisps, my mind trembling upon the verge of his meaning, my imagination winging into distant caverns of unthought things that hid in the elusive dark. Could this be science?

He was saying, "My mind cannot fathom such another realm, nor can yours. You think of land, water, trees, houses, people. Those are only words for what we think we see and feel. But there are beings—sentient beings—in this other state of consciousness, we can now be sure. For Rob, they are coming out! Don't you understand? They have already come into the borderland between the consciousness of their realm and ours."

He would not let me interrupt him. "Wait, Rob! Let us say they have a lust for adventure—or a lust for something else—they are coming out nevertheless. A menace to us—that girl in Kansas is dead." He swept his hand in gesture at the

apparition behind him. "That thing is watching me. As Bee says, it is on guard here. Because, Rob, I found a way of transmuting my identity out of this conscious realm of ours into that same borderland where these things we call ghosts are roaming. And they know it—and so they're on guard—watching me."

He paused for the space of a breath. Bee, white-faced, tremulous, turned to me. "Don't let him do it, Rob!"

"I must," he declared vehemently. "Rob, that's why we needed you here—to wait here with Bee. I'm going in there tonight—into the shadows, the borderland, whatever it is. These—nameless things are striving to come out—but I'm going to turn them back if I can!"

CHAPTER III

INTO THE SHADOWS

There were few preparations to make, for Wilton Grant had planned this thing very carefully. Our chief difficulty was with Bee. The girl was quite distraught; illness, the fear which for weeks had been dragging her down, completely submerged the scientist in her. And then abruptly she mastered herself, smiled through her tears.

"That's more like it, Bee." Will glanced aside at me with relief. "I couldn't understand you. Why Bee, we've been working at this thing for years."

"I'm all right now." She smiled at us—a brave smile though her lips were still trembling. "You're—about ready, aren't you?"

They had set aside a small room on the lower floor of the house—a sort of den which now was stripped of its accustomed hangings and furniture. It had two windows, looking out to the garden and lawn about the house. They were some six feet above the ground. It was a warm mid-summer evening; we had the lower sashes opened, but the shades fully drawn lest some neighbor or passerby observe us from without. On the floor of this room lay a mattress. There was a small table, a clock, two easy chairs. For the rest it was bare. Its white plaster walls, devoid of hangings, gave it somewhat the sanitary look of a room in a hospital.

We had been so occupied with Bee that Will had as yet given me no word of explanation. He left the little room now,

returning in a moment with some articles which he deposited on the table. I eyed them silently; a shiver of fear, apprehension, awe—I could not define it—passed over me. Will had placed on the table a carafe of water; a glass; a small vial containing a number of tiny pellets; a cylindrical object with wires and terminal posts which had the appearance of a crude home-made battery—four wires each some ten feet in length, terminating each in a circular metallic band.

I glanced at Bee. Outwardly now she was quite composed. She smiled at me. "He'll explain in a moment, Rob. It's quite simple."

We were ready. By the clock on the table it was twenty minutes of ten. Will faced us.

"I'd like to start by ten o'clock," he began quietly. "The time-factor will be altered—I want to compute the difference—when I return—as closely as I can."

I had the ill grace to attempt an interruption, but he silenced me.

"Wait, Rob—twenty minutes is not a long time for what I have to say and do." He had motioned us to the easy chairs, and seated himself cross-legged on the mattress before us. His gaze was intent upon my face.

"This is not the moment for any detailed explanation, Rob. I need only say this: As I told you a while ago, the fundamental substance of which our bodies are composed is—not substance, but a mere vortex. A whirlpool, a vibration let me term it. And the quality of this vibration—this vortex—the time-factor controlling it, governs the material character of our conscious universe. From birth to death—from the

beginning to the end—we and all the substance of our universe move along this unalterable, measured flow of time.

"Do I make my meaning clear? From—nothing but a vibrating whirlpool the magic of chemistry has built with this unalterable time-factor what we are pleased to call substance—material bodies. These material bodies have three varying dimensions—length, breadth and thickness. But each of them inherently is endowed also with the same basic time-factor. The rate of time-flow governing them, let me say, is identical."

He spoke now more slowly, with measured words as though very carefully to reach my understanding.

"You must conceive clearly, Rob, that every material body in our universe is passing through its existence at the same rate. Now if we take any specific point in time—which is to say any particular instant of time—and place in it two material bodies, those two material bodies must of necessity occupy two separate portions of space. That's obvious, isn't it? Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

"Now Rob, I have spoken of this unalterable measured flow of time along which all our substance is passing. But it is not unalterable. I have found a way of altering it."

He raised his hand against my murmur, and went on, carefully as before. "What does this do? It gives a different basic vibration to matter. It gives a different rate of time-flow, upon which, building up from a fundamental vortex of changed character, we reach substance—a state of matter—quite different from that upon which our present universe reposes. A different state of matter, Rob—it still has length, breadth and thickness—but a different flow of time.

"You follow me? Now, if we take a material body of this—call it secondary state—and place it in the same space with a body of our primary state, they can and do occupy that space without conflict at the same instant of time.

"Why? Ah Rob, it would take a keener mind than mine or yours to answer that, or to answer the why of almost anything. The knowledge we poor mortals have is infinitesimal compared to the knowledge we have not. I can conceive vaguely, however, that two primary bodies, placed in identical points of space and time would be moving through time at identical rates and thus stay together and conflict. Whereas, with a primary and secondary body, their differing time-flows would separate them after what we might call a mere infinitesimal instant of coincidence."

His gesture waved away that part of the subject. He rose to his feet. "I have particularized even more than I intended, Rob. Let me say now, only that the pellets in this little vial contain a chemical which acts upon the human organism in the way I have pictured. It alters the fundamental vibration upon which this substance—these bones, this flesh we call a body—this substance of my being, is built.

"Just a moment more, Rob, then you shall question me all you like. So much for the transmutation of organic substance. Inorganic substance—that table, my shirt, that glass of water—theoretically all of them could be transmuted as well. I have not, however, practically been able to accomplish that. But I have—invented, if you like, an inorganic substance which I can transmute. It is nameless; it is this."

He was coatless, and now he stripped off his white linen shirt. Like a bathing suit, he had on a low-cut, tight-fitting garment. It seemed a fabric thin as silk, yet I guessed that it was metallic, or akin to metal. A dull putty-color, but where the light struck it there was a gleam, a glow as of iridescence.

"This substance," he added, "I can—take with me." He indicated the wires, the battery if such it were. "By momentarily charging it, Rob, with the current I have stored here. It is not electrical—though related to it of course—everything is—our very bodies themselves—a mere form of what we call electricity."

He was disrobing; the gleaming garment fitted him from shoulder to thigh. About his waist was a belt with pouches; in the pouches small objects all of this same putty-colored substance.

I burst out, "This is all very well. But how—how will you get back?"

"The effect will wear off," he answered. "The tendency of all matter, Rob, is to return to its original state. I conceive also that in the case of the human organism, the mind—the will—to some extent may control it. Indeed I am not altogether sure but that the mind, properly developed, might control the entire transmutation. Perhaps in this secondary state, it can. I am leaving that to chance, to experimentation."

I said, "How long will you be gone?"

He considered that gravely. "Literally, Rob, there is no answer to that—but I know what you mean, of course. I may undergo a mental experience that will seem a day, a week, a month—measured by our present standards. But to you, sitting here

waiting for me—" He shrugged. "By that clock there, an hour perhaps. Or five hours—I hope no more."

My mind was groping with all that he had said. I was confused. There was so much that I no more than vaguely half understood; so much that seemed just beyond the grasp of my comprehension. I seemed to have a thousand questions I would ask, yet scarce could I frame one of them intelligently. I said finally:

"You say you may be gone what will seem a day, yet by our clock here it will be only a few hours. This—This other state of existence then moves through time faster?"

"I conceive it so, yes."

"But then—are you going into the future, Will? Is that what it will be?"

He smiled, but at once was as grave as before. "Your mind is trying to reconcile two conditions irreconcilable. You may take an apple and try to add it to an orange and think you get two apple-oranges. But there is no such thing. Our future—let us call it that which has not yet happened to us but is going to happen. I cannot project myself into that. If I could—if I did—at once would the future be for me no longer the future, but the present.

"The conception is impossible. Or again—in this other state—I must of necessity exist always in the present. Nor can you compare them—reconcile one state of existence with the other." He stopped abruptly, then went on with his slow smile. "Don't you see, Rob, there are no words even, with which I can express what I am trying to make you realize. That being reclined there in the other room a while ago and watched us.

Perhaps for what it conceived to be what we would conceive a day were we to experience it."

His smile turned whimsical. "The words become futile. Don't you see that? The future of that being is merely what has not yet happened to it. To compare that with our own consciousness is like trying to add an apple to an orange."

During all this Bee had sat watching us, listening to our talk, but had not spoken. And as, an hour before in the other room I had noticed her glancing fearsomely around, again now her gaze drifted away; and I heard her murmur.

"Oh, I hoped it would be gone—not come to us in here!"

We followed her gaze. Standing perhaps a foot lower than the floor of our room and slightly behind the side wall was that self-same spectral figure. The intent to watch us, to enter perhaps into a frustration of our plans, with which my imagination now endowed its purpose, made me read into its attitude a tenseness of line; an alertness, even a guarded wariness which had not seemed inherent to it before. Was this thing indeed aware of our purpose? Was it waiting for Wilton Grant to come into the shadows to meet it upon its own ground? With an equality of contact, was it then planning to set upon him?

Bee was murmuring, "It's waiting for you. Will, it's waiting for you to come—" Shuddering words of apprehension, of which abruptly she seemed ashamed for she checked them, going to the table where she began adjusting the apparatus.

"I'm coming," said Will grimly. "It will do well to wait, for I shall be with it presently." He stood for a moment before the thing, contemplating it silently. Then he turned away, turned his back to it; and a new briskness came to his manner.

"Rob, I'm ready. Bee knows exactly what we are to do. I want you to know also, for upon the actions of you two, in a measure depends my life. I shall sit here on the mattress. Perhaps, if I am more distressed than I anticipate, I shall lie down. Bee will have charge of the current. There will come a point in my departure when you must turn off the current, disconnect the wires from me. If I am able, I will tell you, or sign to you when that point is reached. If not—well then, you must use your own judgment."

"But I—I have no idea—" I stammered. Suddenly I was trembling. The responsibility thrust thus upon me seemed at that moment unbearable.

"Bee has," he interrupted quietly. "In general I should say you must disconnect when I have reached the point where I am—" He halted as though in doubt how to phrase it—"the point where I am half substance, half shadow."

To my mind came a mental picture which then seemed very horrible; but resolutely I put it from me.

"You're ready, Bee?" he asked.

"Quite ready, Will." She was counting out a number of the tiny pellets with hands untrembling. The woman in Bee was put aside; she stood there a scientist's assistant, cool, precise, efficient.

"I think I should like less light," he said; and he turned off all the globes but one. It left the room in a flat, dull illumination.

He took a last glance around. The window sashes were up, but the shades were lowered. A gentle breeze from outside fluttered one of them a trifle. Across the room the spectre, brighter now, stood immobile. The clock marked one minute of ten.

"Good," said Will. He seated himself cross-legged in the center of the mattress. In an agony of confusion and helplessness I stood watching while Bee attached the four wires to the garment he wore. One on each of his upper arms, and about his thighs where the short trunks ended.

Again I stammered, "Will, is this—is this all you're going to tell us?"

He nodded. "All there is of importance.... A little tighter, Bee. That's it—we must have a good contact."

"I mean," I persisted, "when you are—are shadow, will we be able to see you?"

He gestured. "As you can see that thing over there, yes."

His very words seemed unavoidably horrid. Soon he would be—a thing, no more.

"Shall you stay here, Will, where we can see you?"

He answered very soberly, "I do not know. That, and many other things, I do not know. I will do my best to meet what comes."

"But you'll come back here—here to this room, I mean?"

"Yes—that is my intention. You are to wait here, in those chairs. One of you always awake, you understand—for I will need you, in the coming back."

There seemed nothing else I could ask, and at last the moment had come. Bee handed him the pellets, and held the glass of water. For one brief instant I had the sense that he hesitated, as though here upon the brink the human fear that lies inherent to every mortal must have rushed forth to stay his hand. But an instant only, for calmly he placed the pellets in his mouth and washed them down with the water.

"Now—the current, Bee."

His voice had not changed; but a moment after I saw him steady himself against the mattress with his hands; momentarily his eyes closed as though with a rush of giddiness, but then they opened and he smiled at me while anxiously I bent over him.

"All right—Rob." He seemed breathless. "I think—I shall lie down." He stretched himself at full length on his back; and with a surge of apprehension I knelt beside him. I saw Bee throw on the little switch. She stood beside the table, and her hand remained upon the switch. Her face was pale, but impassive of expression. Her gaze was on her brother and I think I have never seen such an alert steadiness as marked it.

A moment passed. The current was on, but I remarked unmistakably that no sound came from it. The room indeed had fallen into an oppressive hush. The flapping shades momentarily had stilled. Only the clock gave sound, like the hurried thumping of some giant heart, itself of all in the room most alive.

Wilton Grant lay quiet. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling; he had gone a trifle pale and moisture was on his forehead, but

his breathing, though faster, was unlabored.

I could not keep silent. "You—all right, Will?"

At once his gaze swung to me. A smile to reassure me plucked at his parted lips. "All—right, yes." His voice a half-whisper, not stressed, almost normal; and yet it seemed to me then that a thinness had come to it.

Another moment. The putty-colored garment he wore had lost the vague sheen of its reflected light and was glowing with an illumination now inherent to it. A silver glow, bright like polished metal; then with a greenish cast as though phosphorescent. And then, did I fancy that its light, not upon it or within it, but behind it, showed the garment turning translucent?

I became aware now of a vague humming. An infinitely tiny sound—a throbbing hum fast as the wings of a hummingbird, near at hand, very clear, yet infinitely tiny. The battery—the current; and yet in a moment with a leaping of my heart, I knew it was not the current but a humming vibration from the body of Wilton Grant. A sense of fear—I have no memory adequately to name it—swept me. I rose hastily to my feet; as though to put a greater distance between us I moved backward, came upon a leather easy chair, sank into it, staring affrighted, fascinated at the body recumbent before me.

The change was upon it. A glow had come to the ruddy pink flesh of the arms and legs, bared chest, throat and face. The pink was fading, replaced, not by the white pallor of bloodlessness but by a glow of silver. A mere sheen at first;

but it grew into a dissolving glow seeming progressively to substitute light for the solidity of human flesh.

And then I gasped. My breath stopped. For behind that glowing, impassive face I saw the solid outlines of the mattress taking form, saw the mattress through the face, the chest, the body lying upon it.

Wilton's eyes were closed. They opened now, and his arm and hand with a wraith-like quality come upon them, were raised to a gesture. The signal. I would have stammered so to Bee, but already she had marked it and shut the current off. And very quietly, unhurried, she bent over and disconnected the wires, casting them aside.

The humming continued; so faint, so rapid I might have fancied it was a weakness within my own ears. And presently it ceased.

Bee sat in the chair beside me. The body on the mattress was more than translucent now; transparent so that all the little tufts of the mattress-covering upon which it lay were more solidly visible than anything of the shadowy figure lying there. A shadow now; abruptly to my thought it was Wilton Grant no longer.

And then it moved. No single part of it; as a whole it sank gently downward, through the mattress, the floor, until a foot or so beneath, it came to rest. With realization my gaze turned across the room. The silent spectre was still there, standing beneath the floor, standing I realized, upon the same lower level where the shadow of Wilton Grant now was resting.

I turned back, saw Bee sitting beside me with white face staring at the mattress; and I heard myself murmur. "Is he all

right do you think? He hasn't moved. Shouldn't he move? It's over now, isn't it?"

She did not answer. And then this wraith of Will did move. It seemed slowly to sit up; and then it was upright, wavering. I stared. Could I see the face of my friend? Could I mark this for the shadow of his familiar figure, garbed in that woven suit? It seemed so. And yet I think now that I was merely picturing my memory of him; for surely this thing wavering then before me was as formless, as indefinable, as elusive of detail as that other, hostile spectre across the room.

Hostile! It stood there, and then it too was moving. It seemed to sweep sidewise, then backward. Ah, backward! A thought came to me that perhaps now fear lay upon it. Backward, floating, walking or running I could not have told. But backward, beyond the walls, the house, smaller into the dimness of distance.

Was the shadow of Wilton Grant following it? I could not have said so. But it too was now beyond the room. Moving away, growing smaller, dimmer until at last I realized that I no longer saw it.

We were alone, Bee and I; alone to wait. The mattress at my feet was empty. I heard a sound. I turned. In the leather chair beside me Bee was sobbing softly to herself.

CHAPTER IV

THE RETURN

The hours seemed very long. A singular desire for silence had fallen upon us. For myself, and it is my thought that the same emotion lay upon Bee, there were a myriad questions upon which idly I would have spoken. Yet of themselves so horrible, so fearsome seemed their import that to voice them would have been frightening beyond endurance.

Thus, we did not speak; save that at first I comforted Bee, clumsily as best I could, until at last she was calmer, smiling at me bravely, suggesting perhaps that I would sleep while she remained on watch.

The clock ticked off its measured passing of the minutes. An hour. Then midnight. The window shade was flapping again with the night wind outside. I rose to close the sash, but Bee checked me.

"He might want to come in that way. You understand, Rob—"

Memory came to me of the half-materialized spectre of that Kansas farmhouse, that apparition so ponderable of substance that it must perforce escape by the opened window. I turned back to my chair.

"Of course, Bee. I had forgotten."

We spoke in hushed tones, as though unseen presences not to be disturbed were around us. Another hour. Throughout it all with half-closed eyes I lay back at physical ease in my chair, regarding the white walls of our little room so empty. We still

kept the single dull light; dull, but it was enough to illuminate the solid floor, that starkly empty mattress, the white ceiling, the four walls, closed door at my side, the two windows, one of gently flapping shade. And as musingly I stared the sense of how constricted was my vision grew upon me. I could see a few feet to one blank wall or another, or to the ceiling above, the floor below, but no farther. Yet a while ago, following the retreat of those white apparitions, my sight had penetrated beyond the narrow confines of this room into distances illimitable. And to me then came a vague conception of the vast mystery that lay unseen about us, unseen until peopled by things visible to which our sight might cling.

The realm of unthought things! Yet now I was struggling to think them. The realm of things unseen. Yet I had seen of them some little part. The wonder came to me then, were not perchance, unthought things non-existent until some mind had thought them, thus to bring them into being?

Two o'clock. Then three. Five hours. He had said he might return in five hours. I stirred in my chair, and at once Bee moved to regard me.

"He will be coming, soon," I said softly. "It is five hours, Bee."

"Yes, he will be coming soon," she answered.

Coming soon! Again I strove with tired eyes to strain my vision through those solid walls. He would be coming soon; I would see him, far in the distance which his very presence would open up to me.

And then I saw him! Straight before us. Beyond the wall, with unfathomable distances of emptiness around him. It might

have been our light gleaming upon an unnoticed protuberance of the rough plaster of the wall, so small was it; but it was not, for it moved, grew larger, probably coming toward us.

Bee saw it. "He's there! See him, Rob!" Relief in her tone, so full to make it almost tearful; but apprehension as well, for to her as to me came the knowledge that it might not be he.

Breathless we watched; waited; and the white luminosity came forward. Larger, taking form until we both could swear it was the figure of a man. Lower now, beneath the level of our floor. It came, stopped before us almost within the confines of the room.

We were on our feet. Was it Wilton Grant? Was this his tall, spare figure—this luminous, elusive white shape at which I gaped? Did I see his shaggy hair? Was that his brief woven garment? I prayed that my imagination might not be tricking me.

Bee's agonized call rang out. "Will! Is this you, Will?"

We stood together; she clung to me. The figure advanced, stood now quite within our walls. No longer wholly spectral, a cast of green had come to it; a first faint semblance of solidity. It stood motionless; drooping, as though tired and spent. Was it Wilton Grant? It moved again. It advanced, sank into the floor as though sitting down—sitting almost in the center of the mattress, though a foot beneath it. Significant posture! It had come to the mattress from whence it had departed. It was Wilton Grant!

We bent down. Bee was on her knees. Now we could see details, clearly now beyond all possibility of error. Will's drawn face, haggard, with the luminosity every moment fading from it, the lines of opaque human flesh progressively taking form.

He was sitting upright, his hands bracing him against that unseen level below us. Then one of his hands came up, queerly as though he were dragging it, and rested on the higher level of the mattress. His eyes, still strangely luminous, were imploring us. And then his voice; a gasp; and a tone thin as air.

"Raise—me! Lift—me up!"

Bee's cry was a horror of self-reproach, and I knew then that she must have neglected the instructions he had given her. We touched him; gripped him gently. Beneath my fingers his half-ponderable flesh seemed to melt so that I scarce dared press against it. We raised him. There was little weight to resist us; but as we held him, the weight grew. Progressively more rapidly; and within my fingers I could feel solidity coming.

Again he gasped, and now in a voice of human-labored accents. "Put me—down. Now—try it, Bee."

We lowered him. The mattress held him. At once he sank back to full length, exhausted, distressed—but uninjured. Bee gave him a restorative to drink. He took it gratefully; and now, quite of human aspect once more, he lay quiet, resting.

Bee's arms went down to him. "Will, you must go to sleep now—then you can tell us—"

"Sleep!" He sat up so abruptly it was startling; more strength had already come to him than I had realized. "Sleep!" He

mocked the word; his gaze with feverish intensity alternated between us.

"Bee—Rob, this is no time for talk.... No, I'm all right—quite recovered. Listen to me, both of you. What I have been through—seen, felt—you could never understand unless you experienced it. No time for talk—I must go back!"

A wildness had come to him, but I could see that he was wholly rational for all that; a wildness, born of the ordeal through which he had passed.

"I must go back, at once. The danger impending to our world here—is real—far worse than we had feared. Impending momentarily—I had feared it—but now I know. And I must go back. With you—I want you two with me. You'll go, Bee. Rob, will you go? Will you, Rob?"

A sudden calmness had fallen upon Bee. "I'll go of course," she said quietly.

"Yes, of course. And you, Rob? Will you go with us? We need you."

Would I go? Into the unnameable, the shadows of unthought, unseen realms, to encounter—what? A rush of human fear surged over me; a trembling; a revulsion; a desire to escape, to ward off this horror crowded thus upon me. Would I go? I heard my own voice say strangely:

"Why—why yes, Will, I'll go."

Go! Leave this world!

And my voice was telling them calmly that I would go!

CHAPTER V

LAST PREPARATIONS

Committed thus by my own quiet words, involuntarily spoken as though by a volition apart from me, I strove for calmness. A confusion of mind possessed me. But Bee was quite calm; and presently, though within me the surge of apprehension continued, outwardly I believed I did not show it.

Three of us going into the shadows. And Will said, not to linger this time in the Borderland, but to go on—to penetrate into the depths of the Unknown realm beyond. The very thought of it brought a score of anxious questions to my mind; but when I tried to voice them Will crisply checked me.

I realized now, with an emotion tinged by a faint whimsicality, that Will and Bee had summoned me here this evening with an anticipation of just this outcome. They had foreseen that we all three would make the trip together. They were prepared for it; and Will's first trial had been experimental wholly.

Thus, I found them ready. Two others of the knitted suits were at hand. Two other batteries. But we—Bee and I—had been seemingly indispensable in aiding Will. His departure—Bee had been by his side to remove the battery wires. And far more important, when he returned, his solidifying shadow had lain beneath the mattress. We had been there to raise him up, to hold him until the substance of his body was great enough for the mattress to sustain it. Suppose we had not raised him? Suppose while yet within the mattress space—or within the space the floor of the room itself was occupying—the

growing solidity of him had demanded empty space of its own? The thought brought a shudder—a thought too horrible to be dwelt upon.

During our brief preparations—which Will hurried with a grim haste—he did not once volunteer to explain his experience. And only once did Bee question him.

"You'll tell us exactly what we are to do?"

"Yes. Presently—before we start."

"You said there was need of haste? A real danger to our world here—from those—other beings?"

He was arranging the batteries. "Yes, Bee. A real danger."

"You think we can repulse them? Just three of us going in there? Strangers—"

Strangers indeed. No adventurers into other lands in all the dim pages of history could have felt, or been, such strangers.

He interrupted her. "We will do our best. It is necessary—our efforts.... We will have plenty of time for consultation, Bee. You will understand, when we are there.... Pour three glasses of water, Rob."

My fingers were trembling; it seemed strange that Bee could maintain such calmness. But it was simulated for she said:

"Will, is it—is it very horrible—the changing, I mean?"

He stopped before her, put his hands on her shoulders. His face, so set with its purpose he had forgotten the human feelings of her, softened momentarily with affection.

"No—it is strange—frightening at first. But not horrible. And you forget it soon. Then it's merely strange, awesome—you'll

see—"

He broke off, turned away, and as momentarily his gaze touched me, he smiled. "Awesome, Rob. But for me, this second time, it will be no great ordeal. Even exhilarating—strangely so. You'll see.... We're about ready, Bee."

She took her woven suit and retired. I was soon undressed and into mine. Its fabric was queerly light of weight, and for all its metallic quality it stretched readily, almost like rubber as I put it on. Somehow donning that garment made me shudder. It seemed unnaturally chill as it touched my skin.

Bee presently returned, garbed as we were. In spite of my perturbation, my fear of the dread experience which lay before me, I felt a thrill of admiration as I beheld her. So slim of figure, straight of limb, graceful; and with her grave, intelligent face full of one set purpose—to aid us in every way she could.

"We're ready," said Will briefly. "Here are your belts."

We fastened the broad belts about our waists. The pouches each contained some small object.

"Don't bother them now," Will objected, as I would have examined them. "Later, when we get—in there, will be time enough.... We're ready. What we are to do now is simple—I think there will be no mishap. We will seat ourselves on the mattress. You two may lie down; I shall sit up this time."

"Why?" I demanded.

He smiled. "It is only the first time one feels the sensations that they are disturbing. I'm confident of that. We will have the batteries beside us—" Bee was already placing them on the mattress. "At my signal, we will each disconnect our own. Should either of you be unable—be overcome—I will do it for you."

"But the coming back," I suggested. "We raised you up—"

His smile held a faint ironic amusement. "Don't you think, Rob, we can leave that to its proper time?" He saw my look and added, with the ready apology which made him so lovable:

"Naturally you are apprehensive. But I've planned for that, of course. There are many places where the level of this Borderland—as I call it—coincides exactly with the surface of our own realm. The back corner of the garden outside, for instance. I have remarked it—I can find it—when the time comes for us to return."

Bee said, "Will, I've been wondering—you were gone five or six hours. Were you in there very long?"

His smile was enigmatic. "You can have no conception of this experience—I cannot answer that, Bee—that's why I haven't told you anything—you are so soon to feel and see it for yourself." He was impatient for the start. "I think we're ready. There is so little to do—no chance to forget anything."

With sudden irrelevant thought my heart leaped. That hostile watching spectre.... My anxious glance traveled the room. Bee said, "It's not here—I've been expecting—I'm so thankful it's not here."

It was not to be seen. I was relieved for that, at least. With a last deliberation we all three seated ourselves on the mattress. Will was between Bee and me. We connected the batteries; I held mine at my side, my nerve-shaken fingers trembling, though inwardly I cursed them, fumbled at the switch to make sure I could control it. The pellets were in the palm of my other hand; the glass of water was within reach.

Will said earnestly, "One last thing—and this is important—more important than you realize. Whatever comes, we must keep together. Remember that. You two—strive always to keep with me—close beside me. Whatever impulse you feel—fight it—do not yield to it. Remember you must stay by me."

The words themselves were simple to grasp. Yet beneath them lay a vague import, a suggestion of what was to come, which seemed unutterably sinister. I heard Bee murmuring.

"Yes, I understand."

I said, and marveled at the steadiness of my voice, "Very well, Will—I'll remember."

He said, "Now." I saw his hand go to his mouth. Now I must take the pellets. Within me a torrent of revulsion surged. I must take the pellets—at once. Bee was raising her glass of water. My hand went up; I felt the pellets in my mouth. Acrid. A faint acrid taste spread on my tongue. And then with a gulp of the water I had swallowed them. Breathless I waited, with heart thumping like a hammer, my head reeling, not from the pellets but from this excitement, fright, which swept me uncontrolled.

Will's voice said, "Rob. Your battery—switch it on."

My fingers found the little switch; pushed it. I felt a faint tingling of my limbs; a sudden nausea possessed me; my senses whirled; the room, which all at once had grown very sharp of outline, turned nearly black.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIND SET FREE

I did not faint, and in a moment I felt better. My vision cleared; the room regained almost its normal aspect. But the nausea persisted. I felt a desire to lie down. Will was sitting erect, but beyond him I saw Bee lying on her side, facing us. I reclined on one elbow, holding up my head that I might look around me.

The faintness was gone. The sweat of weakness was upon me, my forehead cold and clammy; but I could feel my heart beating strongly. When was the change to start? It seemed ages since I had taken those pellets.

Then I heard the hum. It sounded as though apart from me; but I knew it was not for I could feel it. A vibration. Not of my knitted suit; a vibration within me; within the very marrow of my bones.

My gaze was fixed upon the table across the room. Its outlines were very sharp and clear, unnaturally so, with that sharpness of detail which sometimes comes to the vision of one who is ill. Now they began to blur—an unsteadiness as though I were looking through waves of heat. Had the change started? I raised my hand, examined it. No change, save that the receding blood had made it a little pale.

The nausea was now leaving me. A sense of relief, of triumph that I was not ill, possessed me. With every alert faculty I determined to remark my sensations.

The vibration within me grew stronger, though to my ears it was unaltered. And then, abruptly the change began. My whole being was quivering. Not my muscles, my flesh, my nerves, but the very matter which composed them suddenly made sensible to my consciousness. The essence of me, trembling, quivering, vibrating—a tiny force, rapid beyond conception. It swept me with a tingling; grew stronger, possessed me until for a moment nothing of my consciousness remained but the knowledge of it.

Frightening, horrible. But the horror passed. Again my brain and vision cleared. My whole being was humming; and then I realized that I could no longer hear the hum, merely felt it. The knowledge of sound, not the sound itself. And an exhilaration was coming to me. A sense of lightness. My body growing lighter, less ponderable. But it was far more than that. An exhilaration of spirit, as though from me shackles of which I was newly conscious, were melting away. A lightness of being. A freedom.... A new sense of freedom, frightening with the vague wild triumph it brought.... Frightening too, for in the background of my mind was the realization that all my physical perceptions were dulling. My elbow was resting sharp against the rough mattress. I dragged my arm a trifle; and dull, far away as though detached from me, I could faintly feel it. I moved my leg. It was not numb. The reverse, it was thrilling in its every fibre. It moved, but I could only feel it move as in a dream. I even wondered if I felt it move at all. Was it not, perhaps, only my *knowledge* that it moved?

Abruptly I became aware that the table across the room had changed. My mental faculties, with all this morbid change of the physical taking place about them, were still alert. I had

vaguely expected the table, the room, the visible, material objects of the realm I was leaving, to remain unaltered of aspect. But they did not. The table had lost its color; a monochrome of greyness possessed it. The table, the chairs, the whole room, had turned flat and grey. Flat of tone; and flat of dimensions as well. The flat printed picture of a room.

But in a moment even that had changed. The grey outlines of the table were dim and blurred; the grey substance of it, no longer dull and opaque, seemed growing luminous. Faintly phosphorescent. Translucent, then transparent. Through the table leg, through the wavering grey image of the room-wall, I saw opening up to me the vast darkness of an abyss of distance. A phantom room in which I lay. The shadow of a room hovering in empty space.

There was no horror within me now. That thrilling sense of lightness, that vague unreasoning triumph of loosened shackles had no thought of horror; and to me came a faint contempt for this phantom room, these imponderable shadows which once had been solid chairs and walls.

Then I heard Will's voice. "The battery! Turn off your current, Rob!"

Heard his voice? I believe I barely heard it—physically a thin wraith of human voice striking my ear-drums. Yet, mingled with that realization, was the sense that he was speaking quite normally. With my mind's ear, the *memory* of his normal voice made me hear his hurried, anxious admonition. "Turn off your battery. Rob! Rob!"

My battery. Of course, the moment had arrived when I must turn it off. I glanced down at it. A shadowy, unreal, phantom battery lying beside me; my grey hand resting upon it seemed to my vision far more ponderable. And then I received my first real perception as to the nature of this change. My fingers groped for the switch, found it. But this shadow battery, of which even then I was dimly contemptuous, was solid beyond all solidity of which I had ever formed conception. My fingers fumbling with it—dulled as were my physical sensations, I could feel those fingers groping as though the adamant steel of that switch were *penetrating them*. A feeling indescribable—uncanny, morbidly horrible, though the incident was so brief the horror scarce had time to reach my confused consciousness. My fingers, not the battery, were shadow—half-ponderable fingers, feeling their way *within the solid steel* of that tiny switch. For a terrifying instant I thought I could not move it. Then—it moved; the current was off. I sank back, exhausted of spirit with the effort. But at once Will's voice aroused me.

"Disconnect the wires. Can you do it, Rob? Quickly—or it will be too late."

I fumbled for the wires; cast them off—gigantic cables they might have been to the futile wraiths of my fingers. Will helped me, I think; and at last I was free, lying back upon the mattress. Dimly I could feel it beneath me, my thrilling, vibrating body resting upon it as though I were a feather newly drifted down.

Moments passed; I do not know how long, I could not have told for my thoughts were winging away unfettered, untrammelled as in a dream.... A dream ... the past, the present—all of it savoured of a vaguely pleasant unreality.

And presently I realized that I was moving; my body—could I indeed call this vanished consciousness of the physical, a body?—my *being* was floating, drifting gently downward, I could no longer feel the mattress; I saw it—a blurred, grey, transparent shadow, coming upward. Beside me, *within me*; then over me as I sank through it a foot or two and came to rest.

Beneath me now, there was a dull sensation. I could feel myself lying upon something apparently solid. Feel it? The feeling was barely physical; rather was it a mere knowledge that I was lying there.

I tried to keep my scattering thoughts together. It was an effort to hold them—an effort to think coherently; an effort to cling to anything—even mental—of reality. I told myself that the change must be nearly complete. *I* was the spectre; this phantom mattress, this wraith of a room—those ghost-like chairs and table floating in space above me—that was my own real world, lost and gone.

A silence had fallen. The hum within me no longer sounded. It was a shock to see that little phantom clock; the movement of its pendulum was visible, but its ticking heart gave no sound. A preternatural silence hung like a grey shroud over a universe of shadows. Then I heard Will's *soundless voice*—heard it clearly now with the knowledge that it was wholly mental, a transference of thought which only my imagination and memory endowed with a familiar physical timbre.

"Rob. Come back to us! Hold your thoughts. Stay here with us."

And Bee's imploring voice, "We are here, Rob. All here together. Sit up—look at us—speak to us."

Was I indeed, nothing now but a mind? Were my thoughts all that remained of me? I fought for reality; for stability; fought for anything real that I could clutch, to which desperately I might cling. Where were Will and Bee? Somewhere here in the shadows. An abyss of shadows everywhere. I thought I could see a thousand miles into that pregnant darkness. I could wander in it at will; my thoughts could wander everywhere.

But I must have conquered, for I found myself sitting up, with Bee and Will beside me.

"There, that's better." I felt the relief in Will's tone. "Hold yourself firm—you'll be used to it in a moment. It's strange, isn't it?"

Strange; scarce have I words—and even those I choose are almost futile—to picture what I saw and felt. The world I had left lay all about me—dim, transparent shadows of familiar things. The room of Will's house—we were sitting just below the level of its floor. Around the room—above it, to one side of it—the phantom house itself was visible. Beyond the house, the gardens, the sombre ghosts of trees standing about—a shadowy semblance of the winding village street—other houses—a hill in the distance—

Mingled with all these shadows—the reality I had left—was the reality in which now I existed. The Borderland, we had been calling it. A vast realm of luminous darkness. A rolling slope upon which we were sitting—a slope, something newly tangible at least, which I could vaguely see and vaguely feel

beneath me. A realm of pregnant darkness, filled with the shadows of the world I had left; and filled also with things as yet unseen—things as yet unthought.... The realm of unthought things....

Will's voice seemed saying, "So strange—but you'll be used to it presently."

I turned to regard him and Bee—these spectres like myself, sitting beside me. What did I see? What was their aspect to this new mind's eye which was mine? I cannot say. I think now that my intelligence saw the intelligence which was theirs, and clothed it out of habit with a semblance of substance for a body—familiar of outline and form since there was no other aspect I could conceive. I saw—or thought I saw, which perhaps is quite the same—luminous grey ghosts of my companions as last I had seen them. Of themselves they appeared not transparent. Through them the spectral walls of the room were not visible; of everything around me, the bodies of my friends seemed the most real.

Will was smiling at me reassuringly. Bee's gaze was affectionate. Their voices, save that I knew I heard no sound, seemed not abnormal. I spoke. It was like thinking words with moving lips. But they heard me; not to read my lips, but to hear my thoughts. Heard with a result quite normal, for they nodded and smiled and answered me.

Then Will touched me; experimentally with a smile, he laid his hand upon my arm. It was not unreal, save that only dimly, as though my senses were dulled, could I feel him. Yet there

was a *weight* to his grip. His tenuous ghostly fingers (as I would have counted them in my former state) were not ghostly of grip to me now. His fingers, my arm, were identical of substance. His fingers could not occupy the space with me; they were ponderable, real, with a dulled reality which gave me at last something to cling to; brought my scattering thoughts together. I was here—Robert Manse; alive—living, breathing—sitting beside my friends. From that moment a measure of the strangeness left me and took to itself the externals only. *I* was real; Bee and Will were real; it was only the things around us which were strange. The body which momentarily I seemed to have lost, was restored to me. A sense of the physical; dulled of perception, but still a body to house my mind. To house it—yet not to hold it firmly. A body which now was not a prison; shackles fallen away. Yet there was a danger to that. Already I had tasted of it—for the mind, too free, is difficult to control.

I was saying, "I'm—all right.... I was dreaming—I got confused."

Bee said whimsically, "We're here. Will, there is so much I want to ask you—"

"Not now, Bee." His voice was full of its old decisiveness. "We must start. Keep together—you understand now, Rob, what I meant. Keep together—keep thinking, firmly, what you are doing. And do—what I do. We must start."

He drew himself erect. As though I were dreaming—or thinking of the act—I felt myself standing erect. Then walking—vaguely I could feel the substance of the slope beneath my feet—walking with a lightness, a lack of effort weird but pleasant. And I clung physically to Will, and saw

Bee on his other side clinging to him also—as though a breath of wind might blow us all away.

The thought was whimsical. There could be no wind. Wind was moving air. I had the sense that I was still breathing, of course. But how could there be air? Air itself was infinitely more solid than these, our bodies. Yet I was breathing something. Call it air. The word of itself means nothing—and there are no words with which to clothe the realities of any unthought realm....

We were walking through the phantom room which had been the reality of Will's home—through its wall—out through its garden. Our slope was rolling, uneven. The shadowy ground of the garden was above us, then below us; then, for a moment, we seemed standing exactly on its level. I remembered. This was the place Will had mentioned to which we could safely return.

We spoke seldom; Will did not seem to care to talk. I realized he knew where he was going—had some definite purpose in his mind. Alert now with every mental faculty, I wondered what it was, yet would not question him.

We stalked onward. The shadowy village lay about us, above us now. Soundless, colorless phantoms, these streets, trees and houses. I saw the railway station—the ghost of a train stood off there and then moved forward soundlessly. I was touched with a faint amusement to see it—a luminous ghost sliding along its narrow enslaving rails. It could not go up or down, or sidewise. And it seemed so imponderable I would fearlessly have walked into it.

This Borderland, full of these shadows of our other world, yet seemed empty. Nothing of its own reality was visible. In

every direction I could look into seemingly infinite distance; and overhead was a vast darkness—the emptiness of infinite space. Was nothing here with us in this Borderland? Those other spectres—those beings coming out from their world as we were coming in from ours?...

A thrill of quite normal excitement swept me at the thought. We had come in to encounter those spectres. And now they would be spectres no longer. Ponderable beings upon an equality with ourselves; and we were here to thwart them of their purpose....

I heard Bee give a faint, alarmed cry. Ahead of us a shape had appeared! It became visible and I felt that perhaps it had been hiding behind some unseen obstacle. It stood, solid and grey, with the shadow of a barn, a haystack above and behind it. Stood directly in our path, as though waiting for us.

I pulled at Will, but he ignored me. Hastened his pace.

We stalked forward with that waiting thing standing immobile in our path!

CHAPTER VII

THE STRUGGLE AT THE BORDERLAND

The thing stood waiting as Will drew us toward it. Fear swept over me. Yet the very sense of fear brought with it a reassurance, for it was the physical I feared; the vanished sense of my body was not entirely gone, for now I was fearing its welfare.

My voice protested, "Will. Wait. That thing there—"

"It is friendly, Rob."

The fear died. I remembered what now seemed obvious; Will had been leading us somewhere with a set purpose. To meet this friendly thing, of course; this thing which doubtless he had met before. I stared at it as we approached. A dim, opaque grey shape like ourselves but it seemed formless, sexless; neither human nor unhuman—a shape merely—a something poised there of which my mind seemed able to form no conception. Then I heard Will say to Bee:

"A girl, Bee—you understand—Rob, listen. We must cling to the realities of our world. There are no other words—no other conceptions—with which we can think these unthought things. This is a girl——"

I thought it was a girl; and at once I fancied that I could distinguish her. Standing there with a phantom barn and haystack of our own world above and behind her. A girl like Bee. I could see the grey-formed outlines of her; vaguely flowing draperies; long hair; a face of human beauty with a

queer wistful look—she was smiling at Will—a friendly smile —.

All this I thought I saw; and in the thinking, brought it to reality. Into my mind then flashed a clearer understanding. This Borderland—and the other inner realm lying beyond it which soon we were to enter—could no more be compared to the world we had left than an apple can be added to an orange. The very essence of every thought we now were thinking was different—incomparable. Yet within our minds was some lingering, unchangeable quality—call it Ego; so that these new things must be clothed in the fashion of the old.

My words grow futile? I can only say then that this first encountered being seemed like a girl, wistful of face; grey, colorless of aspect; yet solid—as solid as ourselves which every moment was seeming a more normal solidity.

Will touched her. "Rob—Bee—this is Ala—she has been waiting for us."

Her voice said, "I am Ala who will do what I can to help you."

The tone seemed soft, liquid, musical and wholly feminine. Soundless words but clearly intoned as though I had heard them with a physical ear.

Bee said, "Why, she speaks English."

It struck a note of whimsicality; the thought momentarily relieved the tension under which I was laboring. And so I think it was with the others; they were smiling; but Will's smile faded as he turned to us.

"You must keep on thinking things like that. Cling always to normality." His voice was earnest. "You also, Ala—English you see, is our language."

"But you are speaking my language," she said gravely.

"Of course," he agreed hurriedly. "Do not doubt it. All of you—I think I understand best of us all. We must strive for our accustomed normality. Remember—the mind now is nearly everything."

"I am—not really confused," I said.

It relieved him; he spoke more quietly. "This girl, Ala, came from her own realm—wandered out here to see and feel for herself what madness was possessing her people."

"It is strange," Ala said abruptly. "I am frightened—" Sudden terror marked her features. I was standing nearest to her and her hand gripped me. Again I felt that solidity. Normality. I was real; I laughed contemptuously at all these shadows. The girl added anxiously:

"Cannot we go back? Now—where all is real—not like this. I—cannot stay here much longer."

"We will go," said Will. "Bee—and you Rob—listen carefully. From now on it is a question of the power of our minds—our will-power. If you wander—weaken for a moment—we are lost. Keep thinking, I am here with my friends. We are going together—going into the other realm." He swung to the girl. "You, Ala, for you it is easier. But yield yourself slowly. If you withdraw resistance you will rush

beyond us. You understand? Above everything else we must keep together."

She nodded.

We clung to each other. Ala began moving forward, drawing us onward up that empty Borderland slope which now was steeply inclined. We passed through the haystack—a mere shadow; passed upward through a corner of the barn roof.

Beneath us now spread the phantom world we had left. But as my thoughts dwelt on what we were going to do, the shadows of our earthly realm seemed fading; growing dimmer, blurring as though about to vanish. I watched them fearfully; when they were gone I would be in darkness—pregnant darkness thronged with things unseeable. I thought vehemently.

"We must keep together—we are going on into that other realm, Will says we are—Will says we must keep together."

But my thought strayed. I remembered Will's house; the room we had left—the little clock—Why, I fancied I almost saw it. Was I there, back in that room?—Where was Bee?—Bee?—

I must have called her name in my thoughts, and at once she answered.

"Here Rob. Right here." And I felt the pressure of her hand.

A struggle of the mind. I knew then that every quality of mind inherent to me was winging backward: tugging, pulling, but I fought against it. And I became aware too of a different struggle within me. I had sensed it for some time past but now it sprang into keen intensity. A struggle of the physical. A vague racking pain possessed me. Dull, detached seemingly from my consciousness, yet I knew it was the pain of my body. It grew sharper. Not intolerable; but frightening with a

sense of horror. It permeated my every fiber; tingling with infinitely tiny needles; and tugging, physically as my mind was tugging, to resume its original state. Like a chip in an undertow, I was being drawn backward....

"Now." I felt Will's tense voice. And Ala's soft words.

"We—are—passed. Hold me—now."

Someone was clutching my arm. I seemed floating, storm-tossed—a feather blown in a wind I could not feel. But abruptly the struggle ceased; vaguely I was conscious that my feet were standing upon something solid—Will and Bee were here—Ala was here—I was a reality once more, and there were rational thoughts to think and real things to see.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REALM OF NEW DIMENSIONS

The shadows of our world were vanished. The Borderland, with its darkness, its drab empty slope, was gone. A new world lay spread about me; new companions. And I was conscious of a new entity—a new Robert Manse, who was myself.

I remember now that my first thought was surprise that I should be able to visualize things of strangeness. But now I know that once over the Borderland my *mind* itself had changed, yet retaining of its old self just enough, so that I might be conscious of the strangeness. In a grey half-light of luminosity seemingly inherent to everything, I found myself standing upon a hillside, gazing down an empty slope of greyness. Was it land? I can only say that it seemed solid beneath me; solid, quivering with a tiny tremble; vibrating, and within itself vaguely luminous.

Overhead was darkness. Yet hardly that, for the same luminosity was there; and I felt that I was gazing, not through emptiness but rather through some tenuous fluid illimitable to my vision, with things there to see, as yet—for me—unseeable.

The slope before me was empty. But shapes were materializing; it was as though I had come out of the darkness, with eyes not yet accustomed to the light. I fancied I saw water in the distance. A white lake; but when I stared, it seemed more like a grey rolling cloud. Was it liquid?...

The mind receives a multitude of impressions in an instant. I was conscious of myself. My body was an entity wholly vague—yet there seemed a tingling in it; a *weight* to it, for I was standing upright. Will and Bee—and the girl Ala—were beside me. I saw them now in their old familiar form, but with a queer sense of *flatness* to them. Flat; unnatural of outline; not grotesque, merely strange, unreal. Almost indescribable; and though distinctly it was not a two-dimensional aspect, I think that *flatness* best describes it. A something about them which was lacking; or perhaps a something added—I do not know.

And inherent to this whole realm as soon I was to see it, was this same queer flatness. Things without *depth*; yet to view them sidewise, the depth was there, with the flatness still persisting.

And I saw color; nameless colors which I might call blue, or red, or green and the words would have no meaning. Men, women—houses, or at least habitations; the words are all I can command, but they are grotesquely meaningless. It was all so incomparably strange; and paradoxically, the strangest of it all was the fashion in which my mind began to accept it. I could think of Ala as nothing but a girl. A frightened, likable girl—with thoughts and feelings similar to my own. This realm was real—a new country; with friends, enemies—a struggle going on within it in which I must play a part. The whole seen and thought of in terms of my own world. And I realized that I—to these others of this other realm—must have seemed a stranger, but not so very strange. Thought of by them in their own terms—each of us upon a common ground, an equality of material state, to visualize the other in terms of ourselves.



CHAPTER IX

THE ATTACK ON THE MEETING HOUSE

Ala was saying, "At last—it is so good to be back." For her the struggle was wholly past; she was smiling, relieved, and upon her face there was solicitude for us. "You are not injured? At rest—now?"

"Yes," said Will. "It is over." His hand touched Bee affectionately. "The strangeness will soon be gone, I think. You all right, Rob?"

"Yes," I said. In truth, every moment a rationality of being was coming to me. And curiosity, of itself evidence of normality, made me ask, "Where are we going? What are we going to do?"

"Going with Ala," said Will briefly. "Her people are friendly to us—deploring the threatened invasion of our world."

I realized that he and Ala at their first meeting must have exchanged knowledge, and planned what we now were to do.

Bee asked, "Are we going far? Will it take long?"

Ala seemed puzzled. "Far"—"long." The words involved Space and Time. I saw that at first they had no meaning to her.

"We are going there," she answered. Her gesture was vaguely downward ahead of us. "Come," she added.

We started. My impression now is that we were walking. I could feel a part of my body in movement, quite as though of

my volition I were moving my legs. A sense of lightness again possessed me; a lack of stability. But I could feel solidity beneath me, and I was moving upon it.

We walked then, down the hill. There was vegetation; things, let me say, seemed rooted within the ground. But they bent from our advance as though with a knowledge and a fear that we might tread upon them.

The scene was no longer empty. A rolling land, with what might have been a mountain range rising in the distance. All in that half-light of seeming phosphorescence. I noticed now that the familiar convexity of earth was gone. The scene had a queer concavity; to the limit of my vision it stretched *upward*; as though we were upon the inner surface of some vast hollow globe with the concave darkness overhead coming down to meet it. A hollow globe within which we were standing; but it seemed of infinite size.

Not far away now was that region which first I thought was water. We passed over it—partly through it. I felt the resistance against me. Like water with no wetness; but to my sight it was a heavy fog lying upon the land. Its breath was oppressive; I was glad when we were past it, emerging again into the twilight with a city before us.

A city! Houses—human habitations! I knew it—divined it with a new mental alertness; and Ala's words presently confirmed my thoughts.

"Our Big-City," she said.

Before us lay an area upon which was spread a confusion of globes. Circular, yet visually flat of depth. In size I found them later to be, from the smallest some twice my own height, to others I would in my own world have said to be a hundred feet in diameter. Opaque grey globes, of a material unnameable. Of every size they lay seemingly strewn about; and in places piled one upon the other. All of grey color that glistened with a sheen of iridescence.

The Big-City. Diminished by distance it seemed indeed as though a thousand varying-sized soap bubbles, smoke-filled, lay piled together. And the whole flattened, queerly unnatural like a picture with a wrong perspective.

The globes were scattered about; but as we approached I saw open spaces twisting among them like tortuous streets. Horizontal streets; and vertical streets as well. Abruptly I realized that this realm was not cast like my own upon a single plane. On earth we move chiefly in a world of two dimensions—only in the air or water do we have the freedom of three. Here, the vertical and the horizontal seemed no different.

Bee said, "The Big-City. Houses—" Her voice trailed away into wonderment. From our presently nearer viewpoint, movement showed in the city; beings—people like ourselves—moving about the streets. And soon we were among the globes—within the city.

I say, "Soon." I can remember no conception of time, save in terms of the events within my ken. How *long* it was from our crossing the borderline until we reached the city I do not know—we moved, walked and entered the city. How far we walked—that too I do not know.

The people we passed did not heed us; the globes, from whatever angle we viewed them were circular, seemingly flat, but always flat in the unseen dimension. We passed close to one. It appeared solid. It had no apertures—no doors nor windows. A man went by us—a shape in the guise of a man; and he entered the globe by passing through it. It yielded to his passage; its substance closed after him, opaque, sleek, glistening as before.

We stopped at a globe of larger size. Ala said, "I will leave you here. And when I come back—we will go together to the meeting place. They are waiting for you."

Will nodded. "Very well, Ala. How long before you come?"

Again she was puzzled. "How long? Why, I will come."

She left us; I did not see how or where she went.

Will said, "Come on. This is our house they have given us."

Together we passed through the side of the globe. I felt almost nothing—as though I had brushed against something, no more. Were the globes of a material solidity? I do not know.

Within the globe was a hollow interior. Call it a room. The same luminous twilight illumined it. A room of circular concavity. No walls, no ceiling; it was all floor. We walked upon it and though we had passed through it, nevertheless it sustained us; and in every position beneath us seemed the floor, above us the ceiling. A memory of the vanished gravity of our earth came to me. The word—the conception—had no meaning here. Yet we had *weight*; the substance upon which we rested attracted us perhaps. I cannot say.

We gazed around us. There were places of rest—rectangles of a misty white into one of which I found myself instinctively

reclining as though with a need of physical quiet. A sense of ease came to me; but it was only vaguely of the physical. I was indeed now barely conscious of a body; but of my mind I was increasingly aware. I could be tired in mind. I was, and I was resting.

Will and Bee were resting also. I saw upon Bee's face that same queer, wistful expression which had marked Ala's; I saw her regarding me intently; and I answered her affectionate smile.

Will said, "The strangeness is leaving us. I'm tired—I wish I did not have to talk, but I feel that I should."

He told us then what he had learned from Ala. This Big-City was the most populous place of the realm. Ala's parent—I might say her father, to make the term more specific—was leader of the Big-City people. One among them—one whom they called Brutar—had found a way to get into the Borderland. He had gone there—and I think that it was he whom we termed the first of the ghosts—whom we had seen that night on the little Vermont farm. He had returned, with tales of an outer world ... tales of the consciousness of a different body ... a physical being with pleasures unimagined....

The craze to follow him spread. An element undesirable among the people seemed most inspired to join him.

"Ala told me little more than that," Will went on. "The method they are using to get to the Borderland—I do not yet know. But I know that this Brutar—he would sweep with his

followers into our world. Physically possessed, in a fashion they could not understand...."

He stopped with the sentence unfinished; it left me with a memory of that Kansas farmhouse, and of the young girl who had died of fright.

Bee asked, "What do they call themselves—these people? This race—beings—" She floundered. "There are no words, yet I have so much to ask."

He shook his head. "All that we have to learn. There is a civilization here—a mental existence in which we'll soon be taking a rational part. For myself, it is less strange every moment."

I nodded. "And Ala's people—they refuse to join in this invasion of our world?"

"Yes," he said. "They deplore it—they're trying to stop it. A meeting is to be held—Ala is coming to take us to it."

I drifted off into a reverie; and Ala came. I glanced up to see her beside us.

"If you are ready," she said, "we will go."

Again we passed through the enveloping globe which was our home: passed along the city street. It was now deserted. We walked on its level surface; it wound and twisted its way between the globes. At times a group of them piled one upon the other—the smallest on top like a disarray of bubbles—obstructed the street. But the substance upon which we walked (it was often barely visible) turned upward; a sharp upward curve to the vertical; then straight up, again leveling off, and then downward. We trod it; with no more effort going

up than upon the horizontal. It seemed, indeed, only as though the scene about us had shifted its plane.

In silence we proceeded. I wondered where the inhabitants of the place might be. Then I saw a few. Not walking openly, these few we now encountered; one I saw lurking in the curve between two adjacent globes. A man ... robed darkly ... a dark hood seemingly over his head ... like a shroud enveloping him to mingle his outline with the darkness.... Darkness? Had the twilight turned to night?... Was this the Borderland again?... I seemed to see its darkness.... I strained my vision for the familiar shadows of our own world.... Was that a tree?... A street?... Was that Will's house over there?...

Bee's agonized voice reached my consciousness. "Rob! Rob, dear, come back to us!"

My mind had wandered, and had drawn with it the tenuous wraith of a body it so easily dominated. I fought myself back. Told myself vehemently I was *not* in the Borderland; I was with my friends. With Will—Bee; with Ala.

I saw them, distantly; with Space I know not how much, nor Time, how long—between us. Saw them; saw Bee with horrified arms held out as though to bring me back. And felt myself whirling in Nothingness.

"Rob! Rob!"

"Yes," I called. "I'm here—coming." And at last again I was with them.

"You're careless, Rob." Concern mingled with the relief in Will's tone. "Careless—you must not wander that way."

Ala said quietly. "There are many like that. A wandering mind brings evil to the body it tosses about."

"But with us now, it is additionally hard," Will said. "Every instinct within us draws us away—as it was with you, Ala, in the Borderland."

"Yes," she agreed. "I know that."

We continued our passage toward the meeting house. That shrouded shape I had seen was not of my wandering fancy, for now I saw others. Peering at us from dark spaces; eyes that glowed unblinking; or shapes of mantled black skulking furtively along the streets. Avoiding us, yet always watching as we boldly passed.

"Brutars," Ala said. "Those who with Brutar would attack your world. They are everywhere now about the city. I am afraid of them."

We came upon the meeting house. It was a tremendous globe, in outward aspect no different from the others save that its size was gigantic. As we neared it I saw that upon its luminous grey surface were narrow circular bands of a lighter color—bands both vertical and horizontal. These also I had noticed on most of the other globes; a lighter color in bands, or sometimes in small patches. I questioned Ala; the lighter-colored parts were where one might safely enter, thus not to encounter the occupants, or the furnishings within.

We passed through one of the bands of the gigantic globe, and found ourselves in a single great room. A globular amphitheatre; to use earthly measurements it had perhaps a

thousand feet of interior diameter. Its entire inner surface was thronged with grey-white shapes of people, save where, like aisles, the space of the outer bands divided them into segments.

The segments were jammed; the people seemed crouching upon low pedestals one close against the other. A few of the pedestals were vacant. None where we entered, and the nearest I saw were almost above us. We passed along an aisle to reach them. The globe and everyone in it appeared slowly turning over, so that always we seemed to be at its bottom with those opposite to us over our heads.

At last we were seated. In the center of the globe, suspended there in space by what means I could not know, was a ball some fifty feet in diameter. Upon it men were sitting. Dignitaries; leaders of the people facing from every angle the waiting throng. And one—a man of great stature—Ala's father, walking around the ball restlessly, awaiting the moment when he would begin his address.

A silence hung over everything. Again I was reminded of the utter soundlessness of this realm. I felt the suppressed murmurs of the people—but I know no physical sounds were audible. Nor indeed, had I ear-drums with which to hear them had such sounds existed.

Time passed as we found our seats. Immobile we sat; and for me at least, time ceased to exist.

Then Ala's father spoke. "My people—danger has come to a strange race of friendly neighboring beings. And it brings a danger also to us all—to you, to me——"

He stopped abruptly. I felt a sound; a myriad of sounds everywhere about us. Shouts of menace; a swishing, queerly aerial sound as of many rapidly moving bodies.

Through all the aisles of the globe, from outside, the shapes of men were bursting. Swishing through the opaque surface of the globe, entering among us, whirling inward. Like storm-tossed feathers they whirled, end over end, uncontrolled with the power of their rush. A cloud of hostile grey shapes in the fashion of menacing men come to attack us!

CHAPTER X

CAPTURED BY THOUGHTS MALEVOLENT

As the followers of Brutar burst into the globular amphitheatre with shouts of menace, a confusion—a chaos—a panic descended upon the gathering. Everywhere the people were rising to flight; struggling to escape, struggling with each other, aimlessly, unreasonably, with scarce the steady thought to distinguish friend from foe. The stools upon which we had been sitting were overturned; the floor around me, and above me was grey with its surging occupants; they were floating inward, struggling groups of them; the air soon was full of them, like feathers tossed in a breeze. I could feel the breeze now—a turgid motion of that imponderable, invisible fluid for which I have no other name save air; a breeze caused by the fluttering things which were ourselves.

It seemed—as the idea came to me from some dim recess of that other mind which had been mine—it seemed an aimless struggle. I was clutched by a dozen groping hands—pressed by half as many bodies. I saw them—indistinguishable as they rocked against me; and felt them dimly. I fought back, clutched at emptiness; or caught something solid. Pushed it violently away, to see it float off, and feel myself drift backward from the recoil of my blow, the physical futilely struggling with its own tangibility.

A whirling gray shape, definitely outlined in the fashion of a burly man, bore down upon me. It halted, gathered its poise and confronted me. A length away, with empty space between us, it stood motionless. Brutar! Recognition came to me; and I

knew then that this was the shape they had termed the first of the ghosts—that spectre we had seen on the bank of the little creek in Vermont. Brutar—he who was leader of these invaders we had come to check. The desire shot through me to attack him now; to kill him.

I plunged; but as though I had leaped into some unseen entangling veil I was halted; pushed backward until again I found myself facing him. He had not moved. With folded arms he stood regarding me. I stared into his eyes. They were glowing, smouldering torches. A wave of something almost tangible was coming from them; and abruptly I knew that it was his thoughts in a wave so ponderable I could not force my body against it. I could feel it, this wave; feel these thoughts, malevolent, commanding, compelling, as they beat against me.

He spoke. "You need not try to move. You cannot, except as I would have you move."

The words seemed inherent to all the space about me; it was almost as though the words themselves were ponderable; but it was the thought of them—his thought of them—which like a net had me entangled. I struggled, if not to advance, then to retreat. I could do neither. The wave had coiled about me. Matter of a tangibility almost equal to that of my own body, it held me enmeshed. Yielding as I fought with it, but holding me as a delicate net will hold a struggling fish.

He spoke again. "Be still—both of you."

Both of us! I became aware that Bee was beside me. Floundering, swept inward toward me, to grip me at last and cling.

"Bee! Bee, dear."

"Rob! It's you! I'm so glad. I tried—I can't get away. I'm entangled—it's all around me. Both of us—we can't get away."

I had no coherent thought remaining, save relief that Bee was with me. I tried to think that I must escape—must kill this Brutar. Like an echo, as though I had shouted them aloud, the thoughts rebounded to beat against my brain with a pain almost physical. I could not think them again. A wall was around me reflecting them back—distorted, agonized echoes, impotent to pass the barrier. And I thought, "I must kill—I—I am glad Bee is with me. Everything is all right—Bee is with me." And yielded, to stand there helplessly clinging to her.

Around us—beyond Brutar's entangling engulfing whirl of thought—I perceived a dim vision of struggling shapes and confused sound. Far away—very far away—far away in distance—in Space; and in Time as well—Why of course—that struggle in the meeting house was in the Past—We were there no longer, either in Space or Time—That struggle in the meeting house had been, but it was not now.—

Bee was still clinging to me. Like submerged swimmers sucked away in an undertow, we swirled within that enveloping thought-wave. Brutar was near us. I could see him—see the grey hovering shape of him. Darkness was everywhere. Solidity gone, save the press of those hostile thoughts and the blessed tangibility of Bee within the hollow of my protecting arm.

A chaos of moving darkness. Or was it that the darkness was immobile and ourselves rushing through it? A chaos of things which I could not see; thoughts which I tried to think, but

could not. Thoughts rushing past me; entities invisible,
uncapturable.

For what length of Time or Space I do not know, Bee and I
whirled onward through that dark mental chaos—imprisoned,
with our captor leading us.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNIVERSE OF THOUGHT

I shall revert now to Will's experience during that attack upon the meeting house as he later described it to me. He had been crouching near Ala. When the hostile shapes burst in, he clung to her. Will was more alert than I to the conditions of this strange existence. He gave no thought to a physical violence; he knew it was the mental struggle which was to be feared; and he kept his mind alert, aggressive to attack.

Ala too, was of help. He heard her murmuring, "Be very careful. Let no evil thought-waves engulf us."

A shape whirled up—a leering man. But Will's thoughts were stronger. The waves clashed with a visible front of conflict; a faint glow of luminous black, in a very palpable heat. The shape cowered, retreated, slunk away.

Everywhere the struggle was proceeding. Upon the center ball Ala's father stood, and with roaring voice and a will more defiant than any within the globe, he strove to quell the invaders. Beat them back. Some retreated; some fell, lying crumpled and inert. Dead? We may call them so. Bodies unharmed. Minds driven into darkness; driven away, to leave an empty shell behind them. Soon the confusion was over. The amphitheatre was strewn with mindless bodies; the dead—never to move again, and others, injured; minds unhinged—irrationally wandering, to return, some of them, to reach again their accustomed abode.

Ala's father—they called him Thone—found his daughter with Will; took Will to his home, where for a nameless time they were together, exchanging friendly thoughts that each might know what manner of world was his friend's. To Will it was the first rationality of this new realm. They reclined within a globe of luxurious fittings which gave a sense of peace, luxury, well-being of the mind, derived by what means Will could not say. He only was aware that Ala was beside him, her father facing them.

He had thought of Bee and of me with fear—had wondered where we were, had wished we were with him. But Thone had told him not to be afraid. It was so easy to wander. We had not come to harm within the meeting house. We would presently come back, or if we did not, he would send out and find us.

The interior of the globe was vaguely luminous. Thone said, "We would perhaps be more comfortable if we could see outside." He murmured words—commands spoken aloud; and a shell of the globe in a patch above them slowly seemed to dissolve—or at least become transparent, so that they saw through it a vista of the city of globes—a city lying then in the vertical plane with the black void of darkness to one side.

Thone was a grave man of dominant aspect; eyes from which shone a power of mind unmistakable. He listened silently while Will tried to describe our Earthly existence. Occasionally he would question, smiling his doubts. At last he said, "It seems very queer to have the mind so enchained by its body."

Then Thone spoke of his own realm. "We Egos—" The word struck upon Will's consciousness with an aptness startling. Egos! Why, of course. These were not people. He—himself—was no longer a man; an Ego, little more.

"We Egos live so different a life. It is nearly all mental. This body—" He struck himself. "It is negligible."

Soon they were plunged into scientific discussion, for only by an attempt at comparison in terms of science could Will hope to grasp the elements of this new material universe. He said so, frankly; and Thone at once acquiesced.

"I will try," he smiled, "to tell you the essence of all we know of—shall we call it the construction of this universe of ours? All we know. My friend, it is only the wise man who knows how little is his knowledge.

"Our world then is a void of Space and Time. The Space of itself is Nothingness, illimitable. Yet to our consciousness it has a shape, a curvature, like this that is around us now." He indicated the hollow interior of the globe. "To traverse it in a single direction, one always tends to return."

Will said: "A globular void of Space. I can understand that. But how big is it?"

"There is no answer to such a question," Thone replied gravely. "To our material existence, our consciousness, it is a finite area, yet within it some of us may go further than others. A mind unhinged takes its body very far—or so we believe—and yet sometimes returns safely. A mind departed from its physical shell which it then leaves behind—is gone forever. Yet that too, is illogical, for traversing a curved path such as ours—however slight may be the curve—one must

eventually return. And out of this we have built a theory that such a mind—or as we call it, an Ego—untrammelled—will return sometime to take a new body. But I must not confuse you with mere theories when there is so much of fact which is confusing enough no doubt."

"That's not confusing," said Will. "We likewise have such a theory—we call it reincarnation."

Thone went on: "We have then, a void of curved Space. Within it exist Thoughts; material entities persisting in Space for a length of Time. Thus Time is brought into our Universe; but not Time as you have described it to me. Ours, like yours, is the measure of distance between two or more events. But the distance is very dimly perceived by our senses."

"Wait," said Will, "Before you discuss Time, let me understand the other. All your material entities are Thoughts? That is incomprehensible to me."

Thone deliberated. "I suppose that is natural," he declared at last. "Your substance—as it appears to you—has a greater solidity than the substance of your mentality."

It was Will's turn to smile. "The latter, with us, has no substance at all. The human mind—as distinct from our physical brain—is wholly intangible. And it is one of the things we know least about."

"Perhaps that is why it seems so unsubstantial," Thone retorted. "At all events, with us mind-qualities are the basic substance out of which all matter is built. A variety of

qualities, which vary the resultant product, be it an Ego, or a thing inert, all are from the same source—a thought."

A Universe built from a Thought! Yet to Will then came the realization that our realm is of an essence equally unsubstantial—our own matter—rock, metal, living organisms, what are they of their essence save a mere vortex, a whirlpool of Nothingness?

A question came to Will; and even as he asked it, he knew its answer. "Your Universe built from a Thought? Whose thought? You start with Nothing, yet you presuppose the existence of a Mind to think that thought."

"A Mind All-Knowing," Thone answered very slowly. "A mind Omniscient. Have you not spoken of your own belief in such a mind? We call it our Creator-Mind—as quite literally it is."

Will said, "Of itself; that is not concrete to me who am in a measure of scientific reasoning."

Thone said warmly, "That is where you of your Earth—as you call it—are wholly mistaken. And indeed, I begin to see where there is not so much difference between your world and mine as we suppose. Let us assume we have the same Creator, his thought to bring us and all that we call our Universe into being."

"Granted," said Will. "But there the similarity ends. You start with a Thought? We start—"

"With what?" Thone demanded.

"Scientifically speaking," Will answered lamely, "we have no beginning. At least, we have not yet been able to explain it."

"We then are more logical than you," Ala put in with a gentle smile.

"Perhaps," agreed Will. "But you cannot connect your Thought with your Science—or at least you have not, to me as yet."

"But I will," declared Thone. "We take this Thought and find it to be a vibration of Nothingness. Of what is your basic substance composed?"

"The same," said Will.

"Quite naturally. We are then of a similar origin—constructed only to a different result. Our substance, in its final state, remains to our consciousness a vibration of Thought. It is quite tangible. Let me show you. Touch me—your hand feels me? That is the physical—cohesive Thought—matter, persisting in Space and Time throughout my existence. Distinct from that, there is my material—mentality. It also persists in Space and Time, but to a lesser degree. More transitory. More varied in its outward qualities, since I can fling out thought—vibrations of good or ill—of many kinds and types.

"Understand me, my friend. This is Matter of temporary duration which I can create myself at will. Or—in terms of your own realm, if you prefer—I can set into vibration, into motion, intangible matter already existing, and by its very motion bring it to tangibility. Can you understand that?"

"Yes," agreed Will readily. "And you surprise me with constant similarities to my own world. We believe our own thoughts to be vibrations of some substance intangible. And when you speak of creating an appearance of substance by imparting motion to something otherwise unsubstantial, that too we see in our world. Water is a fluid. A stream of water slowly flowing from a pipe offers no solidity to a blow from a rod of iron. But if that water comes from the pipe with a swift enough motion, a blow struck against the jet with an iron bar seems to be repulsed.

"That seems not actually the creation of new matter, but we have another effect which is this. A tiny rod of steel—a needle the length of my finger—may hang motionless balanced upon a pivot. It is a material body which we would call three or four inches long, by one-hundredth of an inch thick and broad. We set it swinging—vibrating—whirling in a circle with the pivoted end as the center. With a swift enough movement that circle is impenetrable. In effect, out of that needle, we have created a steel disc, one-hundredth of an inch thick, with a diameter of say eight inches. An area of material substance hundreds of times greater than the needle—yet the mass is not increased."

"Quite so," Thone agreed. "Our thought-waves have a mass infinitesimal. But like your steel disc, they can momentarily become very tangible to our Ego-senses. A tangibility very different, yet comparable to our bodies themselves. Less mass, yet more power. Under some circumstances they may alter an inert substance, as I have made transparent to our vision that segment of the globe over there, beyond which we see the city. Or they can enmesh a material organism—your body, for instance—I had meant to demonstrate that."

He moved away from Will, stood quiet; and about Will he flung his wave of thoughts, so that Will was drawn irresistibly to him—as Bee and I were even then enmeshed by Brutar's thought-substance.

Thone laughed. The net of his thoughts dissolved. "You see? It is a very tangible substance. Yet elusive as well. We understand partially its uses. Yet only partially. Its nature is varied from a tenuosity impalpable, to the physical substances which form the entities of our universe. Like that thing you described as your Light-waves, our Thought-substance can traverse Space with tremendous velocity. Not a finite, measurable velocity, as with your Light, but with a speed infinitely rapid.

"A thought may travel to infinity and back in an instant. That—understand me—relates only to its most tenuous form, impalpable to our physical senses—perceived only dimly and only occasionally by a mind other than that from which it originates. In more solid forms its velocity is slower. But it is all under control of our Ego-willpower. Do I confuse you?"

"A little," Will admitted. "I am trying to hold a clear conception of it all. I understand you have a void of Space. Must it not be filled with something besides these Thought-entities? Some all-pervading, impalpable fluid?"

"We do not know," said Thone frankly. "There are emanations from our immobile organisms. Thus we breathe and eat—the substance of our bodies is renewed—but of that I shall tell you more at another time. You were saying—"

Will went on: "This realm then is filled with your material bodies. This globe we are in—the globes that make your city—the Ego which is you—and myself—other Egos like us—What holds us where we are?" He smiled. "I'm groping, I'm trying to say, is there no gravitation? No gigantic material body holding us where we are: Out there in the open—" He gestured. "We walked upon something. A surface—a slope. What is it?"

"You ask me many questions at once," Thone replied quietly. "Gravitation, as you call it—yes, with us it is the inherent desire of every particle of thought-matter to cling to its fellows. Thus everything of substantiality tends to cluster at the center of the void. Only motion enables it to depart, which is why it must always move in a curved path—a balancing of the two conflicting forces.

"You question me about some gigantic material substance—like your Earth. There is none. You asked me upon what you walked out there in the open. You walked upon the curvature of Space. Upon a false, a mere semblance of solidity which was the resultant balance of the forces moving you. This globe—this city—it lies immobile upon a solidity equally false—immobile because there is nothing to move it."

"I think I understand a little better," Will said slowly. "All force then, as well as all matter, has its source in the Ego-mind."

"Of course. We create matter, and movement of matter, by our own volition. We have been originally created by the Divine-thought; after which we construct and maintain our Universe by Ego-thought of our own. Inert substance—the mind laboriously creates it; flings it out, solidifies it, moulds it to

our diverse purposes. Living organisms—the reproduction of the Ego-species—is similarly of our Ego-mind origin. Yet there is a difference there. For me to reproduce myself in Ala, the Divine-Thought—the assistance shall I say of the Great-Creator—again is necessary. We have not been quite able to fathom why it is so—but it is. There is a difference between an Ego and a thing inert—a vital something which only the Great-Creator can supply."

Ala suddenly interrupted; and upon her face I saw fear. "Your friends—those whom you called Bee and Rob—they are in danger. She—that girl as you called her—that girl Bee—is sending out thoughts of danger. I can feel it."

Thone said: "Try, Ala—could you find her? Where has she gone?"

"I don't know. Her thought-matter is streaming back here. I can feel it—very faintly—but it has reached here. She is with Rob—and there is Brutar."

Thone was upright, with Will beside him. Will was surging with fear. "Danger to them? To my sister—to Rob—"

Thone said: "He has entrapped them—Brutar has entrapped them—all unwary since they do not know how to use these new minds which are themselves. We must try and get them—Oh, my friend, there is so much that I would tell you—but another time—not now. For if they are in danger we must go to them. That Brutar is a Mind very powerful.—"

And out there in the void, Bee and I were being rushed onward. The shape of Brutar with his leering, triumphant face swept ever before us. A dark confusion of mental chaos

plunged past. Dismembered, leprous shapes of things, which I thought I saw.

Was this insanity? I felt that evil engulfing net around us—pressing us—dragging us through the darkness.

Then abruptly the scene clarified. The darkness melted before a luminosity so blessed I could have cried aloud with the relief of it. The leprous shapes were gone. Motion stopped; we were at rest, with the net of Brutar's thoughts dissolving from us. Rationality. Again I could think things which were not diseased—

I murmured: "We're all right, Bee. You—you are well again?"

"Yes, Oh, yes, Rob. But I'm so frightened."

Brutar stood before us. "I need you—I am fortunate to have you here. You whom they call Rob—with your knowledge of that Earth-place you can be of great help to me."

He swung toward Bee. "You whom they call a girl—" His twisted look was horrible. "I am glad to have you. We shall go to your Earth together—I welcome you both to this place where we are preparing for our great Earthly conquest."

He led us down a slope, into the strange activities of his encampment.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENCAMPMENT IN THE VOID

Brutar said, "Let us go in here. I want to talk to you."

We entered a globe very much like those of the Big-City. And reclined at physical ease. But there was no mental peace here—for us at any rate. A turgid aura of restlessness seemed pervading everything.

Brutar rested before us. He seemed always to be regarding Bee; contemplatively, yet with a satisfied triumph.

"I am glad to have you with us," he said; not harshly now, rather with an ingratiating note as though he sought our good will. "We are going to your Earth—to live there, and they tell me, these good people of mine, that they are going to make me its ruler."

He spoke with a false modesty, as though to impress us with his greatness forced upon him by his adoring followers. "I want you two for my friends—you will be of great help to me."

"How?" I demanded.

I had recovered from my confusion. I was wary; the thought came to me that I might be able to trick this Brutar—that being here with him—to see and feel what he was doing—was an advantage which later on I could turn to account. I wondered if he could hear or feel that thought. I willed it otherwise; and it seemed that he could not. His eyes were upon me, gauging me.

"How could we help you?" I repeated. "And why should we? You mean harm to our world."

"No," he protested. "No harm. We have selected it—your Earth—from all that great Universe of yours which I have inspected. We want to go to your Earth to live. That is all. You can help me, because you know so many things of Earth that I do not. I want you to tell me of them.... Stand up!"

I found myself upright, whether by my own volition or his I cannot say.

"Stand up, Bee!"

At his command she also stood erect. He came to us; his hands went to the belts we wore about our waists. I had forgotten my belt—those things in its pouches which Will had bade me not touch. Brutar took them now—my weapons perhaps. And those which Bee carried; took them, discarded them behind him. They floated away; I could barely see them—small formless blobs to my uncomprehending thoughts.

I had very nearly resisted Brutar; but it seemed a futile thing, and I stood quiet. Again we reclined. "Tell me of your Earth," he said; and began to question me.

I told him what I could. I had determined that my best plan was to appear friendly. I wondered how one would escape from a place like this. I was more accustomed to this strange state of being now; knowledge which seemed instinctive was growing within me. I knew that if Brutar's net of thoughts were not to hold me—if I could momentarily be freed of other thought-matter—then I could project myself out into the void. I believed I could find my way back to the Big-City—once having been there I would have the power to return.

This latter knowledge brought with it a thrill of triumph. I believed that Will and Thone had never been here in Brutar's strong-hold. Perhaps this was a secret place which they could not find. But now I had been here; and if I could escape, I could lead others back to it.

With these guarded thoughts surreptitiously roaming through my mind, I was all the while describing our Earth to Brutar. He interrupted me once. "Eo, come here."

I became aware of another shape hovering near us. It now advanced; and with Brutar's words of explanation it took form in the fashion of a young man. A smiling, deferential youth seemingly of an age just reaching maturity. He came forward meekly. Brutar spoke.

"This is my friend whom we call Eo. I have trust in him—he is helping me greatly. I want him to hear what you have to say, Rob."

Eo smiled again. "I hope we shall be friends." He regarded Bee, and his smile was curiously gentle. "They call you a girl? Brutar tells me what girls are—I am glad to see you."

He reclined beside Bee, continuing to regard her. A very gentle, guileless youth—how queer a companion for this Brutar! And I knew then that it was gentle beings like this whom Brutar was beguiling to his purpose.

Brutar said, "Go on, Rob. What you can tell us will be very interesting."

Particularly he questioned me about our physical bodies of Earth—the human body; and when I told him how mortal it was, how easily injured, he seemed disturbed. But only for a moment.

"I have been—well, very nearly in your Earth-state," he said. "I know how it feels. You have things with which to harm that body. Weapons—tell me of them."

I described our weapons; our warfare. Our poisons. I will admit it gave me a gloating pleasure grewsomely to picture all the dangers to which our mortal flesh is heir. But outwardly he was undisturbed. He interrupted me once with a sharp admonition to Bee.

"You think you can send your thoughts back to the Big-City and guide them here, don't you? I would not try that, if I were you!"

Bee started with guilt. She had been attempting to do that. Her thoughts had gone back, at first instinctively, then with a conscious direction, but he was stopping her now. Around us like a veil a barrier was materializing.

Eo said gently, "She will not do that, Brutar. She is friendly to us." His hand very lightly touched Bee. He added earnestly, "I like you—girl."

Brutar momentarily had turned away; I think he was not aware of what Eo had said. I saw that Bee was smiling. I felt her voice saying very gently.

"I like you, too. You are very kind—I think you are very good. On Earth we would call you—a boy."

"Boy!" He murmured it. "I like the way that sounds—hearing you call me—boy!"

Brutar had risen erect. "You have told me a great deal, Rob. We shall be friends." He was eyeing me. "On Earth when we get there, I shall make you into a great man—a very powerful man. You would like that?"

Did he feel that my intelligence was so limited that he could bribe me thus crudely? I smiled.

"Oh, yes—I should like that. But I've told you so much, and you haven't told me anything. How did you first find our Earth? How did you get yourself into that Borderland, and beyond? You were the first to go, weren't you?"

"The first," he said proudly. "I discovered it—well, by accident. Shall I show you how? And what I am doing to take all my loyal followers there with me?"

"Yes." I agreed. "That is what I want."

He led us outside. Eo walked close by Bee. I saw now that the encampment was itself one tremendous hollow globe; on Earth we would have said that it had a diameter of at least a mile. Brutar explained it proudly. Here, in the void of Space, his organized workmen had spun this huge shell of thought-matter. It was tenuous; I had not known when we passed through it coming in. Yet it was visible; within it we gazed at its interior surface. It glowed with a very pale dull light.

Upon this concave slope, in the foreground near us, were a variety of globes—small habitations for the workers. Paths ran between and over them. Further away, other larger globes glowed as though translucent, with light inside. Beyond them was a shimmering white lake—water or mist. Higher up—in the distance where the concave surface extended upward and swept back over our heads—was what seemed like dark soil.

Things were growing there in orderly rows—a gigantic concave field of plants. It was dim off there, and so far above us that I could not make them out plainly.

Again, close at hand, just beyond the village of globes, was an enclosure possibly a thousand feet across. Movement was there—busy workers moving in the artificial glow of strings of lights. Vague, shifting shadows—grey shapes of men, from which the lights cast monstrous grey shadows as they moved. It seemed a dim inferno of strange industry incomprehensible.... Brutar led us toward it.

"We built all this," he said; and his gesture encompassed the entire inner void within that glowing tenuous shell. "We built and poised this here in Space. My followers have forsaken their homes to join me here. Soon we will go to your Earth-realm.... Some of us often go out there now—into that Borderland—to test our power."

The enclosure had a wall about it—a thick high wall built of a grey substance lying in layers, folded in convolutions. We stood upon the wall, gazing at the scene within.

"I would not have you see too much—now," Brutar said.

A cunning look was on his face. "Not—too much, until we are better friends and I can be sure of your loyalty."

The lights were dazzling when near at hand—yet their rays carried but a little distance. I saw in the foreground beneath us, a section where men were squatting one behind the other in a long curved line. Their backs were bent forward, with

heads and necks unnaturally held upright. Their arms and hands were outstretched in a curious attitude as with supplication. There must have been two hundred of the men, squatting in this single line which curved in a crescent until its end was near its beginning. They were men with bodies which seemed shrunken; their arms and hands very long; thin, tenuous. But their heads were over-large; distorted to a swollen size.

Brutar said softly, "Now—in a moment—watch them."

A leader, raised above these squatting, motionless workmen, gave a signal. From the head of the man at the back of the line a pallid light seemed streaming. It was very faint—a glow of pale white light, no more. But as I stared, breathless, I saw that it was not exactly like light, but a stream of something moving. Very faint; a fog, a mist, which a sweep of the hand might dissipate.

It streamed forward; and as it passed the head of the next man, there seemed additional light adding to it. Both men had their hands up, as though to guide the stream—gently to guide that which must have been very nearly impalpable.

But it was growing in density. Soon, further up the line with every brain contributing a share, the slowly moving stream began to have substance. From vague, luminous pallidness, it turned darker; gaining a solidity—a weight. The guiding hands sustained it, moulded it, pushed it onward.

It came to the end of the line. Other workers appeared; carried it away—a long flexible rod of newly created thought-matter. The basic inorganic substance of this world. The thickness of a man's body, it seemed coming of interminable length. Then the first worker gave out—dropped back exhausted. Then

others. The rod grew tenuous and pale in places. It broke. Workers carried away the broken segments. It was not a solid yet; they moulded it by their touch as they carried it away.

Another signal from the leader. The two hundred workmen, their duty done for the time, rose and departed. They moved unsteadily, exhausted. And another shift came to take their places.

How long a spell of mental work this might have been, I cannot say. Bee asked me, in an awed whisper, how long we had been watching. A futile question! As Will once said, "Like trying to add an apple to an orange." To me—idly watching, and with memory of an Earth-standard of what we are pleased to call Time—I would have said, five minutes. To one of those laboring workers—an eternity of effort. Yet in our fatuous little world of Earth we tick off seconds, minutes, hours, and think we are establishing a standard for the Universe!

Brutar said, "That is the crude thought-material. From there it goes to our workshops, where other minds bring it to higher, individual substances from which we make—well, we make these things we are making here."

His look of cunning came again. He would give away no secrets to me—his enemy. He seemed very proud of his cunning, this Brutar. A man of low intelligence, I realized. Yet he must be powerful, to be the leader of all this. Later I learned that he had a powerful mind—not for creating this useful substance of industry; nor was his an intellect of keen reasoning ability. Rather was it a mind powerful for the weaving of that tenuous thought-substance of combat. He was

a warrior. And in mental speech as well, he was fluent, plausible, guileful.

Bee was saying, "Is all work mental?"

He did not understand the question. Eo said, "She means, is all work done by the mind?"

"Oh yes," Brutar smiled. "Why not? Except—well you've seen what part the hands play—the bodies. It is comparatively unimportant."

"May we see what they are doing with that thought-substance?" I suggested.

"No," he smiled. "I told you before, not now."

I did not press it. I was wondering if the shell of this huge globe would let me through. Could I clutch Bee and will myself away into the void? Could I not thus escape Brutar....

My thoughts must have reached him. He said sharply, "If you regard the welfare of your mind, Rob, you will not attempt to wander." His tone changed to a menacing contempt. "I can strike that sickly mind of yours from your body in an instant. Have a care!"

I fancied I caught a warning glance from Eo. Bee gave a low half-suppressed cry of fear. I smiled at Brutar.

"You are too suspicious," I said. "If we are to be friends you go about it badly."

He did not answer that, and I added, "You said you would tell us how you discovered our Earth-realm. It must have seemed an extraordinary discovery."

His vanity was easily touched. He smiled again.

"Yes, I will tell you. And show you. It is no secret—that leader Thone of the Big-City knows it.... So I do not mind showing you."

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOLOS FLOWER

We stepped back from the wall. Brutar led us onward through the twilight. We passed globes translucent with light from within; heard the hum and hiss of work going on—but Brutar would not let us enter. We passed a dark bowl of enormous size, like a great globe cut in half. We encircled its rim. I stared down into darkness; grey shapes of inert things were ranged there—things which had been manufactured of the thought-substance, I surmised. But Brutar would not say.

We skirted the misty lake. It seemed a blanket of fog lying there. Within me, at the sight, a vague pang stirred. A desire—unpleasant in its suggestion of a needed gratification; and with it a premonition of coming pleasure.

I was puzzled. There was no instinct to guide me; or if there was, my puzzled reason subverted it. I described my feeling to Eo.

"It seems physical," I said. "I had forgotten my body—but there seems a pang there."

"Thirst," he said readily. The word he used, gave me the thought of thirst. And this was water, or its equivalent.

I knelt beside the white layers of mist. Did I inhale it, or drink it? I have no means of knowing; but I know that the pang left me, and that the experience was vaguely pleasant.

We moved on. Came at last to the great field. Behind us the opposite side of the encampment—the enclosure wherein I

had seen the creation of thought-material—was now almost over our heads. The ground of the field was soft and flaky—it seemed as though it might have been a black soil lying in flakes. Things were rooted within it—growing things set in long orderly rows that stretched up the concave surface into the dimness of distance. They appeared to be plants; in height about to my knee. A central stalk; branches bent outward like gesturing arms. A bud, or flower, at the top. It seemed to carry features—a face. My imagination? Something that had been said or suggested to me? Possibly. But the things bent aside as we advanced upon them. They seemed eyeing us; suddenly I was conscious of a myriad eyes from everywhere fixed upon me.

I said to Brutar, "This black ground—is that thought-material?"

"Yes," he said. "Made from the same substance you saw created. But many mental processes were necessary to bring it to this final state."

"And then you planted these—things in it?" I asked. "They look as though they had an intelligence. I don't understand that. Are they growing here—or what?"

Brutar hesitated. I think that the man's learning was not very great. Eo said:

"I believe I can explain it, Rob. All things in our world are divided into two classes. One—the inert, material bodies. These we create from nothingness to their final perfected state. The other class—living organisms—is very different. The addition of a Creator-Thought is necessary. These plants—to be specific—are called lolos. The lolos plant. To create it we must have a spore—an infinitesimal something already

existing. With this spore, others like it may be created by our own mentalities. And nurtured by our mentalities through a period of growth. But that latter process can be simplified by the production of this soil in which the plants are then nourished. It is basically an identical process."

"It is much like our own world," I said. "Except that these plants seem to have a conscious mind."

"Why not?" Brutar demanded. "Every living thing has a mind."

Eo added, "Since the essence of everything is mentality—naturally the spark of life must bring that mentality to consciousness."

"These things then," I said, "they know that they are alive?"

"Of course. And Rob, what you told Brutar of your Earth-agriculture—what you called your vegetable kingdom—seems not so very different from ours."

"But it is different," I said. "Our plants—our growing things—are not aware that they are alive."

Eo demanded gently, "How do you know that? Is it not perhaps that your own mentality is lacking, to gauge the power of theirs?"

I smiled. "It may be so.... Brutar, these lolos plants—what is their purpose?"

"With them we are going to your Earth," he said. "This lolos plant of itself has a power very wonderful. We crush it; and

the blood of it taken into our body, sends the mind upon strange and pleasant wanderings."

"Evil wanderings," said Eo.

A drug! As Brutar further explained, I realized it. And I wondered if this lolos plant—the name of it—sounded thus since to my own mentality it suggested the lotus flower. I think that was so.

The blood of this plant was a powerful narcotic. Brutar had been addicted to its use; and his wandering mind had come into the Borderland. He had seen our Earth-realm; gone further until he experienced the sensations of our physical consciousness. Had come back, to gather his followers; to create in quantity the blood of this lolos that all might go to conquer and enjoy this greater realm.

Brutar was absorbed in his subject. Listening to him, I had nevertheless noticed that Bee's attention was fixed upon Eo. She was whispering to him. With his sweet, boyish face, he was listening to her, enraptured. He was close beside her, and I saw that he was touching her. Brutar, still talking to me, bent to show me one of the lolos plants. It shrank away from him as though in fear. He frowned; struck it a blow with his hand. His attention momentarily was diverted from us. I heard Eo murmur softly, yet tensely.

"You are right—girl. This is evil—I realize it now.... Rob! Hold yourself firm! Stay with me! We will try to escape...."

I must revert now to Will, Thone and Ala in the Big-City. They had felt Bee's thoughts; they knew we were in danger; Ala had caught just enough to know that we were with Brutar.

"We must go," Thone hastily declared. "Try and follow them, Ala.... That Brutar is a mind very powerful for evil."

With Will held firmly between them, they swept out into space. To Will it was a dream, a nightmare of mental chaos. Rushing through the dark—through seemingly endless Space for endless Time. But he saw none of the distorted things that I had seen, for he was in friendly hands. A rushing black Nothingness sweeping past. A vague dream of flight; but presently he found his mind clearing.

The void was illimitable. But soon it seemed not wholly empty. To one side was a faint glow—an infinite distance away, as though it might have been a nebula gleaming over Space a thousand million Light-years of distance. Or something shining from another Time—eons away. It moved sidewise as they swept along. It glowed, faded, was gone.

"We will not go there," Ala murmured. She seemed to shudder. "That is the Realm of Disease. I hope never to go there."

Endless Time passing. Or perhaps, as Will was thinking, Time was in abeyance, standing still, non-existent.

And Will saw other far-off gleaming patches, like faint drifting star-dust. Soon they were gone. He did not ask what they might be.

Ala still felt Bee's thoughts. Then they ceased. Will became aware of a confusion; a fluttering; as though now the flight

had lost direction. He gazed around intently, searchingly, but the space at that moment was wholly empty.

"Where are we?" he asked.

Thone and Ala were exchanging thoughts. Thone said:

"Where are we? There is no answer, Will. There is nothing here. We are nowhere."

A confusion. It seemed that Ala and Thone felt that Brutar's self-created world might be found by approaching the Realm of Disease. Will waited, listening silently while they talked of it...

Abruptly Will saw something. A blur—a vague luminosity beneath them. It was moving. Suddenly he knew it was not large and far-away, but small and very close. It mounted; broke visually apart, resolved itself into two dark blobs. Shapes. The moving shapes of a man and a woman.

They came nearer. The woman was Bee! It was Bee and the youthful Eo. He was clinging to her; she seemed helping him struggle upward.

They reached Will. Bee gasped, "He—he is hurt! Oh Will—it's you! Help him—his mind struggles to leave us! He is wounded. I think—I think he is going to die!"

She seemed crying as she flung herself into Will's arms. "I don't want him to die. He is my friend—so gentle, so lovable—I don't want him to die!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE REALM OF DEATH

I must tell again of that moment when we—Bee and I—were standing beside the lolos field with Brutar and Eo. Brutar had turned away. Eo—prompted, I had no doubt, by Bee—murmured, "This is evil! We will escape—"

My arm reached for Bee. I told myself intensely that now we must escape ... now I must fling my thoughts—my mind—out into the void.... And stay with Eo; he would lead us....

I think my groping hand never reached Bee. I felt a swishing sound. A swirl of thoughts struck me—like feathers blown against me in a gale. But they seemed to cling. Invisible, imponderable—barely palpable; dimly I could feel these thoughts like a net entangling me.

I was floundering. Surging through blackness. Where was Bee? I thought I saw her and Eo whirling near me. But it was a thought unreal—hallucination; for as I tried to grip it and make them visible, they were gone. My thought of them dissolved into a realization that I did not see them, for they were vanished.

But Brutar I saw; a distorted wraith of him ... his grim, menacing face ... grim with combat....

I was rushing through blackness. But as an undertow may suck the strongest swimmer, something was pulling me back ... a hampering net around me ... materializing into greater ponderability ... holding me firmly.... The blackness about me was taking form. I strove to think I saw the Big-City. Told

myself that that hovering shape above me was Thone—the friendly Thone; not Brutar.

But it was not Thone; and this place that was clarifying to my vision was not the Big-City. The lolos field! I came—was dragged, sucked back to it! The lolos field—I was standing there where before I had been. And the menacing shape was Brutar—my captor standing there grimly confronting me.

But Bee and Eo were gone.

These two, escaping, came upon Thone, Will and Ala as I have related. Came upon them hovering nowhere in the void. Eo was stricken. Brutar, with what quickness and evil power of mind I could not conceive, had struck at Eo. A wound, a derangement not physical, but mental. His mind now—sick, stricken with disease. Almost wandering; yet not quite unhinged—for the power of his will was holding it. Bravely he clung to sanity. Fought for it. Yet those—his friends with him—knew then that he fought a losing battle.

They hung there in the void. Bee was sobbing, "I don't want him to die! He is my friend."

He held tightly to her. His eyes were very wistful. "They call you a girl—and now I know I love you!"

The void was moving. It seemed so to Will; seemed that the blackness was moving past them. Or was it that they—the little knot of their hovering shapes—was moving? Then Will realized that it was Eo—his stricken, wandering mind—dragging them somewhere. The void seemed moving—for how long Will did not know. And then, far away, in Space and in eons of Time, something became visible. A faint star-dust glow. A luminous patch. It broadened; spread to the sides, and

up and down until everywhere before them lay its gleaming radiance.

The realm of disease! Will heard Ala murmur it in accents of sorrow and apprehension. Eo was rushing for it—and no power that they had could stop him.

The radiance intensified. A fear—a shuddering horror possessed Will. With every instinct within him, he recoiled from the approach. Revolted. But he held tightly to Thone and to Bee; told himself that they would lead him safely.

Everything was glowing; they were wholly within the glow now. A silvery glow that shone everywhere about them. But soon to the silver there came a greenish cast. It deepened. A green, with its sickly look of death. Green, with the silver turning to a pallid, flat, dead whiteness. And then a mingled brown; a murk, like a fog pervading everything.

Abruptly Will became conscious that Eo was no longer with them. His last despairing cry; and Bee's echo. He was going—floating downward; while they, uncontaminated, hovered above, at the edge of the realm, to see it but not to enter.

Will saw but dimly. Saw shapes floating in there.

Dismembered shapes. Others, whole, floating inert. A cauldron, with bubbles of sight and sound, and smell.

Shrouded in murk. Unreal.... A wailing ... sobbing ... faint aerial voices wailing like ghosts distraught.... And a stench—the thought of it, no more—but to Will the thought, the knowledge of all this was horrible, fearsome. Singularly fearsome; above everything at that moment he feared this realm, this state of unnatural, tortured existence....

They could still talk to Eo. See him there, laboring, losing his brave fight to come back to them. He seemed very far away; and yet very close, for though his form was down there, engulfed with all the leprous horrors of disease, his voice was very plainly heard. And his face, the image of it, the physical representation of it to Will's thought, seemed again at hand. His eyes were very wistful. He was smiling gently at Bee.

"Soon, girl, I will be gone—into death—it is very near now. I can see it—see it, just ahead...."

Will saw it, too. Another realm beyond the one they were skirting. The realm of death. It lay close ahead. Dark. Mysterious. Scarce to be seen, but only imagined.

Again came Eo's faint voice. "I shall—be there in a moment. It is very—beautiful. I can see it—right here—" And then he suddenly whispered, "I love you, my girl Bee—"

And vanished.

Or did he vanish? The shell of him then seemed lying in Bee's arms. But it was an empty nothing; the shell of a shape of something which once had been, but now was not....

Thone said gravely, "Watch it, Will. The Thought is gone from it. Our own thought-matter is all that is left. You shall see of what permanence that is."

The dead shell lay inert. It was dissolving.... Grewsome.... Will turned away; then forced his vision back to see a leprous wraith—a rotting shape which presently, like a melting fog,

began to dissipate. Dissolving, until the very last essence of it was gone into nothingness.

Ala seemed to sigh. "It is very horrible. Yet I think that we are wrong to consider it so, for it is Nature."

Will recovered himself. The realm of disease had withdrawn to a memory. Around him the blackness seemed purified. But ahead he could see—or thought he saw—that other endless realm where dwell what we call the dead. Questions flooded him. Eo was there? Could they not go and see him? Could he—this Entity which had once been Eo—could he not still speak to them from beyond the borders of death?

Thone said, "We will approach it if you wish."

Unnameable time; and then Will found that they were there, hovering; and a realm, a place—a something he knew not what—lay spread above them. Earnestly he groped for it. Not with his physical hands; but with his senses. His thought went there and back. He thought he saw shapes up there. Hovering, glowing shapes in a great light space. And with futile, childish imagination he endowed them with beautiful, ethereal qualities; transfigured them into glowing human shapes of beauty and peace. And thought he saw them; and that they might speak to him. Or that perhaps, because Thone might be more than human, they might communicate with Thone, and thence to him.

And then he laughed. It was all so childish!

Thone said, "Eo is there, in the darkness and the light. You can think of him. Your thought will go there. And it will come back to you, fraught with what qualities your imagination may lend it. But nothing else."

"No," said Will, "nothing else. I understand that now."

CHAPTER XV

THE BIRTH OF A THOUGHT

They turned away in the void—away from the dark-light mystery of the realm of death, and drove themselves back to the Big-City. The search for Brutar's encampment was at the moment futile; they knew they could not reach it. And though Bee had escaped with Eo, she did not know whether I escaped or not.

They hoped to find me safely returned to the Big-City. But I was not there. But still Thone felt that I might come. To Will—with his inherent, instinctive conception of a placid, measured Time—the delay seemed dangerous. He was impatient; anxious to do something. But there was nothing which of himself he could do; and Thone was an Intelligence very keen. Will decided that upon Thone he must rely.

They went back to the home globe, to rest and to wait for my possible arrival. Will in a way was glad of the inactivity, for he remembered that of Thone's plans he knew almost nothing. He would learn all he could; and with something definitely arranged, they could act to better purpose.

Will felt the pangs of hunger. They brought a glowing brazier wherein something smouldered. He ate—inhaled, there is no word for it. Satisfied his pangs; and drank of the silver mist which came flowing into the globe at a word of command.... And slept; lost consciousness, to find himself in blackness with Time wholly gone.

But still I did not come back to the Big-City. There were times when with Thone, Will journeyed about the city streets, gazing at this strange life. He saw thought-workers, as I had seen them in Brutar's encampment. Saw the water being created; saw the thought-matter moulded and spun into new globes—moulded to all the diverse purposes of this Ego-life.

He slept again; several times; and ministered to the slight wants of his tenuous body. A great length of time seemed passing; and still I did not arrive.

There were many talks that Will had with Thone. Ala and Bee were generally there, as befitted those of their sex.

Sex? It was interesting to Will. The creation of the individual Ego of this strange realm, so different an existence, and yet in fundamental conception so like his own. Already he believed that the same Creator governed both. With strange ways that we mortals so little understand, over all the realms, the states of existence, the Universes that possibly could exist—only one Creator held sway. The Thought—there could be but One.

Will said, "You once spoke, Thone, of yourself as Ala's parent. And the necessity of the Thought to the creation of Ego-life. Will you explain that? In our world we have two sexes. Have you also?"

"Yes," said Thone. "In the higher forms of life—we humans, as you would say—there are, like yours, two sexes. Call me a man—and Ala a woman. The difference is one of mental capacity; mental qualities, inherent perhaps to the Ego. I call it the Soul, though we have no name for it. I mean that something which makes each individual different from every other.

"The qualities inherent to the individual mould and form the mentality. Characterize thus, what we call its sex. The one sex is a complement to the other. An attraction exists between them—a desire for proximity so that of their own inherent force they will draw together. And the one mentality derives force—a mental life-force—from the other. An exchange—for it yields its own necessary qualities in return. Thus we have the mating—the basis of the family. Without it no complete mental health is possible. There is no mentality capable of existing in health by itself."

"And a birth?" Will suggested.

"Communion of thought. The desire, the longing of two closely interwoven mentalities of complementary qualities. When they combine with an intensity of longing, the thought-matter they mutually create brings into existence another, smaller shape like themselves. It is very small—very tenuous—scarce to be seen save by those two who have produced it. It lies inert. Almost formless, though they sit beside it and strive with their loving thoughts of what it should be—strive to give it form. It may continue to lie inert; and at last in spite of their efforts, it may dissolve, dissipate—be gone, back into Nothingness from whence they drew it. The Thought was not within it; it never was anything then save a human longing unblest.

"Or again, the Thought may be there. It lives. Grows ponderable. Moves of itself. Thinks of itself. Then it *is* something itself—something independent of all save its creator-divine.... The little nourishment of its body is easily

supplied; the mother-parent gives it lovingly the needed gentler nourishment of the mind; daily she adds to it the loving tendrils of her thought-matter so tenuous that to the sight it seems mere light.

"But if the spark is there, glowing brightly, the little Ego lives. Grows in size. Displays a growing mental capacity of its own. Its own mental qualities make themselves known, to identify it as a man-child, or a woman-child. And the Ego, developing, brings it to individuality. It is Itself; unlike everyone else. The new Individual.... That, my friend Will, is a birth."

Will thought a moment. "There is a beauty to it."

Bee said, "I don't quite understand—" She gazed at Will, puzzled; and Will felt and understood her confusion. He said:

"Your explanation, Thone, seems to make Man differ from Woman only in qualities of the Soul and Mind. You do not speak of the body; yet to me, Ala here appears of very different form from yourself."

Thone smiled. "You say, 'to me.' You have answered yourself, my friend. The physical aspect of everything is but the reflected image of it within our own mentality. The gentleness of Ala—those qualities which make her what she is—are seen by you in the form of what you call a woman."

"But," protested Will, "does she not look the same to you?"

"That I do not know," he returned earnestly. "Nor do you. We can only see, think, imagine for ourselves. Our conscious

universe is our own; it exists of our own creation, and what it is of itself apart from us, I do not know."

"We have on Earth," Will said, "a school of philosophical thinking which believes that nothing exists apart from the mentality perceiving it. Believes that without a consciousness of existence, nothing can exist."

"That may be so," Thone replied gravely.

Bee was still puzzled. She said to Thone, "Ala, to me, looks different from you. She looks, as Will says, like a girl. Won't you tell us how she looks to you?"

He thought a moment. "She looks—like Ala," he said slowly. "I think we mould our images from the individual itself—not upon a generality of sex. She looks to me like Ala, as I know her to be. Very gentle. Very keen of reasoning. Very quick—" He smiled. "Yet not always so very logical. She looks like the Ala of my creation—mine and that other mentality whom you would call her mother—" His voice turned solemn, with a singular hush to it. "Her mother—who has long since gone into that realm of mystery."

At other times they talked of practical subjects. Brutar's coming invasion of Earth; my own fate, since I still was missing, unheard from. And they talked of what could be done to overcome Brutar and his horde of followers.

Thone, it seemed to Will, had accomplished very little. He had learned of Brutar's purpose; and of the establishment of his realm. Thone had sent—by the aid of the lolos plant—an adventurer into the Borderland who had seen Brutar and some of his cohorts experimenting with the Earth-state. Then Ala

had gone into the Borderland; had met Will; had arranged to bring him, Bee and myself back to see her parent.

Little of accomplishment! A public meeting of protest, which we had attended; and which Brutar invaded. But now Thone was organizing his Thinkers—his army, as it might have been called on Earth. Their purpose was to seek out Brutar's realm by concerted effort of thought; to find it while Brutar's preparations were still incomplete; and to destroy it.

The very conception of warfare of this kind was difficult for Will to encompass. There were no weapons—nothing of the sort we on Earth would call weapons. Will showed Thone his broad belt, and the contents of its pouches. He drew out a revolver and a knife. Thone inspected them curiously—shadowy, glowing objects which almost floated when tossed into the air, so imponderable were they.

Will explained their Earthly uses. He said, a trifle shamefacedly, "I brought them—but I felt they would be of no advantage here."

He pulled the trigger of the revolver. If it discharged, there was no result which his Ego-senses could perceive. Thone said, handing him the knife, "Strike me with it."

The action was instinctively revolting; yet Will drove the knife-blade into the semblance of Thone's arm. Thone said, "It seems to hurt."

To Will the knife might have been a feather he was thrusting against a pillow. He withdrew the blade; fancied he saw in Thone's arm an open gash. But if he did, the gash closed at once. The outlines of the arm were quivering, unreal, under

Will's earnest gaze. And he knew that if he persisted in regarding it, the arm would turn formless to his sight.

He exclaimed, "Useless! Of course." And tossed the knife away. But Thone recovered it. "In the Borderland it would be more effective, Will. Keep it."

Thone explained how his army of Thinkers might destroy Brutar's encampment. The thought-matter, created, was held in substance only by continued mental effort. And this withdrawn, at once the disintegrating forces of Nature would dissolve it into nothingness.

"So it is," Thone said, "when an Ego dies. The persistent, subconscious effort of mind during life is all that holds the shell of body in existence. Withdraw that—and you have dissolution."

"And with inorganic matter—" Will began.

"With this globe, for instance," said Thone. "With everything we have created, a worker-mentality must guard it. Replenish it."

To Will that seemed not very strange. "On Earth," he said, "we must repair. Nature slowly but steadily tears down that which we have built."

"Of course," Thone responded. "We will destroy Brutar's encampment, himself and all his followers. Rather should I say, we will force them to stop replenishing—and Nature will destroy."

Then Will said, "Let me ask you this: I understand that if you, with your weaving of the net of thoughts, are quicker, more powerful than I, you will beat down my resistance. Entrap me; force my body to follow you."

"Or to depart from me," Thone added. "I could force you back—as far from me as I could spin the net."

"I was thinking—suppose we must fight them in the Borderland—"

"A combat at once physical and mental," Thone retorted. He smiled. "You think we are ill-prepared, Will? That is not so. My men of Science have studied this condition—experimented with it very fully. The Borderland—the transition into your Earth-state—all such things are new to us. But we are coming to understand them. And I think that Brutar's people know little of their subject...."

He paused in contemplation; then went on slowly. "We are not sure how permanent may be the transition by the lolos-blood into the state of your Earth-matter. Brutar may be mistaken in that—"

He paused again. His smile had a gleam of irony; and there came into his voice an ironic note. "I am not sure but that from the Borderland, our opposing thoughts might not reach your Earth-state. They might, perhaps, do strange things to those of Brutar's people who have reached there—who have taken with them what they may think are effective weapons."

That Thone had learned, or divined much of Brutar's purpose, and that he was prepared to combat it, was evident. But at the moment he chose to speak no further. He added abruptly, "My Thinkers are organized. Very soon they will be ready. The

mind, my friend Will, grows strong only with use. Every moment that they can, they are developing the strength of battle.... Come here and see."

They passed upward upon the side of the globe; and at once its opaque wall began to glow; become translucent; transparent, until through it Will saw the city. An open space, from this angle seemingly tilted on end, was nearby. Within it a horde of shapes were squatting. Figures which after a moment of inspection seemed men—gaunt of body, but with craniums distended. A horde—a myriad; Will could not have guessed at their number. Squatting in a giant spiral curving inward to its center point. From the heads of them all light was streaming. It spun in a band close over them; whirled, flashed with iridescent color. A spiral band of light, concentrating at the center point into a beam that shot away and was lost in the darkness.

The globe wall became again opaque; the scene vanished. Thone said softly, "There is much power for combat in mentalities like those. And very soon I will put them to searching for Brutar's realm."

A cry from Ala interrupted him. The girl had been seated as though in meditation; but now she flung herself erect.

"I can find this encampment of Brutar—I can lead you to it now!"

Thone stared.

"Are you getting thoughts from it?" Will demanded eagerly. And Bee gave a glad exclamation. She asked, "Is Rob there? Is he safe, Ala? Can you take us to him?"

"I do not know if he is there, or safe. Oh, I cannot tell you those things! I only know I can take you to Brutar's realm!"

"You feel no thoughts from there?" said Thone.

"No."

Thone was standing with the others. No delay now. He was ready. He said to Will, "It is the nameless power. Those only whom you call women have it."

"Intuition," Will supplied.

"We say, the nameless.... You may try, Ala. And, if once you take me there—" A restrained, grave triumph was upon him.

"Once I have been there, with perfect sureness I can lead our Thinkers to the attack."

Again in the void.... The power of woman's mentality—the nameless power; illogical, against all reason, all science; not to be explained.... But it was leading them.... A rush through the darkness of vague, unreasoning woman's thought; a distance, a time felt, but unmeasurable; a direction not to be fathomed.... And then, ahead of them as in a clinging group they followed Ala, the glow of a poised realm became visible. They neared it; hovered in the void regarding it. And knew and saw that it was Brutar's realm—that great, tenuous globe hanging there like a gigantic bubble. They could see within it; see details as though by some magnification the details were close at hand.

The encampment was deserted! Abandoned! The lolos field was uprooted; its plants gone. The globes, the workshops, the streets, fields—all were deserted. And more than that, with the removal of all conscious, constructive, replenishing mentality, disintegration already was taking place. A leprous

realm. Holes of Nothingness were visibly eating their way into everything. Rotting walls ... rotting habitations....

Under the gaze of the watchers the whole realm was melting. Dissolving into slow-flowing viscosity; cesspools of putridity, rising into mists, vapors—a puff of Nothingness....

The realm was vanished. The void was black, empty and silent. The little group of apprehensive watchers turned away.

Brutar—presumably taking me with him—had already started his invasion of Earth!

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARCH OF THE GHOSTS

I remained a captive of Brutar; and at length the time came when he was ready to start his conquest of Earth. His army, his followers, quietly had departed from the encampment, and were waiting for him in the Borderland. He stood before me—we two the last living minds remaining in his self-created realm. Around me I could see it even then beginning to rot and crumble.

He said, "The blood of the lolos is ready for us, Rob. But before we start I will warn you—if once more you try to escape you will be killed." I could not doubt but that he spoke his true intent.

He brought then a bowl, or brazier, in which like food the dried burning blood of the lolos was glowing. It was a dull red in the gloom, with tiny green tongues licking upward from it. I could not see the smoke. But I could sense it—smell it. We reclined by the brazier. The fumes brought a reeling of my senses. Unpleasant, frightening.... Then pleasant indeed. A drowsy drifting into rosy vacancy. I had intended not to yield myself wholly, but my will weakened.... I told myself that Brutar would guide me....

Out of the darkness at last with returning consciousness I found a gentle net of Brutar's thoughts cradling me. And himself regarding me impatiently.

"Come, Rob. We are here. Stay close by me—and if you help me as I wish, reward shall be yours."

There was a tenseness to his voice. I gazed around. We were in the Borderland—that same dark void with its rolling slopes. Near at hand I saw some two hundred of Brutar's workers—his fighters—drawn up in orderly array. Shadows like myself. And behind them a rabble of Egos in the fashion of men, women and children. His followers, waiting to enter the Earth-realm when the fighters had conquered it.

I saw, too, hovering near Brutar and me, a dozen shapes of men—the leaders of Brutar's army awaiting his instructions.

When I was more fully alert Brutar drew me aside. He spoke with a new force and succinctness. Because now the time for action had come and I think also that as we neared our Earth-state, there was a tendency toward restoration of all Earthly qualities.

"Rob," he said, "I'll tell you now my plan. Your greatest city is near at hand—somewhere near here."

"New York," I said.

"Yes. I plan to attack it—demolish it. It's a very small portion of your Earth, of course, but with that evidence of my power I think your Earth-leaders will cease to fight me—will admit my supremacy. If not—well, then I shall demolish each of your great cities in turn—"

He told me then that these two hundred men, with his dozen sub-leaders, were all the fighting force he at first proposed to use. We were about to attack New York City. His people would wait, here in the Borderland, for our success; then would enter the Earth-state to take possession of it.

"You can help me, Rob, because you know your city better than I do. Look around us now—tell me exactly, where are

we?"

I saw then the shadows of ghostly houses. My own world! Grey, spectral houses ... streets ... a church ... trees lining a street of residences in a small quiet town. It lay in a plane tilted at a slight angle, and perhaps thirty feet above us. I looked up to the street overhead. Quiet? It was thronged with people—ghostly shapes crowded up there staring down at us. It seemed to be night up there; I could see the street lights; spots of light in the houses, and the headlights of scurrying automobiles.

The town was in a turmoil. I knew that its people saw us down here as a myriad half-materialized ghosts. They were crowding to watch us. They realized that now at last the ghosts had come in a horde! Perhaps to attack. I saw policemen on the streets; and presently a company of soldiers came along. Spurts of flame showed as evidently they fired tentatively toward the ground. But there was no sound.

Brutar chuckled. "Well, they're really frightened now! And they have cause to be. Where are we, Rob?"

It seemed possibly a suburb of New York City. I did not recognize it at once. Then off to one side I saw a shadowy river, with ghostly cliffs on its further bank. The Hudson!

"I don't know where we are," I said carefully. "Where do you want to go first, Brutar?"

"To New York City—down there where there is river all around, and a great pile of buildings."

Lower New York. But I would not lead him. I protested ignorance.

A shape approached us, a man. He gestured. "I know it is that way, Brutar."

We started. The two hundred fighters in a triple file came after us. Brutar had ordered the mob of men and women to wait where they were. We advanced slowly, and I saw with sinking heart that we were going southward. Upper New York City soon lay close ahead.

It was a strange, soundless march. The slopes of the Borderland carried us sometimes above, and sometimes below the ground of Earth. But generally we were below it. Up there over our heads the shadowy landscape was silently slipping backward. It was all too familiar now. We were under upper Broadway. Huge apartment houses loomed high up there, with the Hudson almost at our level to the right.

Our advance was followed up above. From every window people were peering fearsomely down at us. The cross streets were jammed. But ahead of us policemen were clearing them. And down empty Broadway, and down each of the North and South Avenues troops of the State Militia were marching, keeping as nearly as possible directly over us.

"Brutar," I said, "you cannot fight this world. Look at them there. They're ready—waiting."

Machine guns were posted at most of the street corners now; and as we passed beneath them they were moved swiftly forward to other streets ahead of us. The boat traffic of the river was being cleared. Police boats, armed and ready, were paralleling our march. A war-vessel lay anchored ahead, off

Grant's Tomb. Its funnels were smoking, and as we neared it, very slowly it steamed along with us.

And over in Jersey and on Long Island I had no doubt they were ready with watching troops and every precaution. Let one of us who now were mere ghosts dare to materialize further, and at once we would be killed. What could Brutar do?

He laughed at my thoughts. "You shall see, Rob, when we get among the great houses and I lay my weapons."

I could not fathom what he meant, but the sure confidence of his tone had an ominous ring to it. Weapons? I saw none. We were empty-handed, Brutar and I. And the twelve sub-leaders were empty-handed as well. But of Brutar's attacking force marching behind us, I had noticed that each man was carrying a single article. I could not call them weapons; I did not know what they were. They seemed more like grey, ghostly bricks, each man carrying one.

What were they? I could no more than guess. Some material, doubtless of Brutar's creation, brought into this Borderland state. Would these ghosts, each with a simple brick like these—would they dare to materialize—dare to enter our Earth-state upon an equality of being with the armed, massed troops awaiting them? It seemed incredible. Two hundred ghosts marching in spectral array beneath the city, with soldiers above; and machine guns, and war-vessels alert to destroy them.

I told myself that there was nothing to fear. I had thought of escape. Desperately I would try to rejoin Will and Bee that we might do something to stem this invasion. Or escape, and get up there to Earth, to tell the authorities what I knew. But sober

reason told me that as yet I knew very little. I had best stay with Brutar, to learn what I could.

We passed under the length of Manhattan; came at last to lower Broadway. We were close beneath it. The great shadowy piles of masonry towered above us. Looking upward I could see the shadowy outlines of the foundations of the buildings; to the right the tubes leading to New Jersey beneath the river; the network of water mains; gas; light; arteries of the city. And I could see up through the sub-cellars, the cellars, and into the buildings themselves. Towering structures with all their anatomy laid bare as though some giant X-ray were turned upon them.

We stopped; gathered in a group. We were just beneath City Hall Park, standing partly within one of the Subway tunnels. No trains were running. Soldiers were massed on the station platform. They came along the tracks—transparent ghosts of uniformed, armed men—came until some of them passed directly through us; and stood nearby, grimly watching and waiting.

In the empty park overhead, policemen were on guard, and troops were bringing in machine guns. I could see, too, that soldiers were now massing on the shadowy Brooklyn Bridge; police boats were clustering on the river there; and armed men were waiting in the cellar of every building nearby. There were towering giants of buildings all about us here.... The Woolworth Building was close at hand....

Brutar said, "I should not care just now, to materialize further, Rob. These men look very determined." His laugh was ironical. "They are watching us closely—much good it will do them!"

He called his little band of fighters to him; they stood partly on the Subway tracks and partly beneath them. And he gave his low-toned instructions.

I saw ten of his men move aside as he indicated them. "Yes," he said. "You first. And I think I would work upon that large house over there."

Silently, with their ghostly glowing bricks in hand, the ten advanced. Across the Subway tracks, through the spectral earth and rock strata under Broadway. Climbing or floating upward, I could not tell. Moving through and into the vitals of the Woolworth Building.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ATTACKING SPECTRES

I said to Brutar, "You asked my help. But you have let me do nothing to help you—and you explain nothing, so that I have no idea what is going on. Am I not enough your friend by now?"

Brutar smiled; I think he was fatuous enough to believe that he had won me over.

"You will be able to help me, Rob. We're going to place these weapons everywhere. There is a statue near here somewhere—a giant figure rising from water. I want you to lead us to it. Later—when we have finished with this great house."

"Weapons?" I echoed. "What sort of weapons?"

He continued to smile. "You called them bricks a while ago. That's what they are—inert material we brought with us. I had devised other things, but thought that these would suffice. Come here—I'll show you."

He took one of the bricks. As I stood with him to examine it, a score of the ghostly troopers came across the Subway tracks and fronted us.

It was a light substance, but quite ponderable. Solid, yet rather of the consistency of soft rubber; I seemed to be able to mould its shape slightly with my fingers. Blue-green of color or silver phosphorescence; and it glowed and shimmered in my hands.

I gave it back to Brutar. "You're going to place these—where?"

"Everywhere," he said. "You shall see. Let us go watch my men place them up there in the great house.... This fellow is very bold! He doesn't seem afraid of me!"

He strode vigorously at the intent and curious soldier—passed through him; but the soldier did not move.

"Come, Rob—let's go up and watch them."

We moved under the Woolworth Building, up to and through the bottoms of its great elevator shafts. And climbing—upon what I cannot say or guess—we passed upward and into the building. Through its walls; its skeleton framework of steel; floating back and forth through its many storied offices....
Roaming ghosts!

The ten ghosts of Brutar were floating silently about. We ourselves could be seen by those within the building—seen as spectres hovering, moving with what silent, sinister purpose they did not know.

Yet they tried to resist us. We came, for instance, upon one of Brutar's men, with the brick still in his hand.

"Shall I place it here?" he asked. "We have chosen this side—I thought this might be a good spot."

We were some four stories above ground. Before us was one of the great upright girders of the structure.

"I should think so," Brutar agreed.

The man held the glowing, oblong brick within the shadowy steel. He released it, and it floated gently downward—wafted

down like a feather very slowly. But it kept within the outlines of the girder.

"You'd better follow it," said Brutar. "It will stop presently—and perhaps where you want it."

Inside the building the Earth-people had seen us—we three hovering there. Men and soldiers were running from room to room, and up and down the staircases trying to get near us. There was a room and a portion of a hallway close to where we now hovered. They were soon thronged with men, crowding against the walls, within which our white shapes were visible. But the walls, solid to them, stopped their advance. They stood regarding us; and now I could see fear upon their faces as their glances followed the downward floating brick. And as it descended a story, many of them rushed down, scrambling against the walls, striving to reach into the place where they saw it.

Did they divine its purpose? I thought so; for as presently it came to rest, lodged in the upright steel where cross girders were riveted, I saw men come rushing with crowbars and axes. Frantically they were tearing at the walls, ripping out the wood and plaster, striving to reach and perhaps to dislodge that shimmering thing lying there in the vitals of the building.

Brutar laughed. "You see, Rob? They're beginning to understand now—and they're frightened. *It is materializing*—that brick, as you call it, is materializing!"

Growing solid! In a surging torrent of horror complete realization rushed over me. I scarce heard Brutar's gloating words: "That inert matter, freed of physical contact with our Borderland bodies, tends slowly to change to the state of the thing nearest to it. As heat by contact communicates, so does

the vibratory rate of all substances. That brick, lodged there, is materializing. Slowly now—but soon very fast. Presently it will be as solid as the steel girder itself—a brick resting there complete in your Earth-state—demanding space of its own, for its own existence!"

Space of its own! What diabolical force of Nature would this unleash! These molecules, atoms, electrons of the steel and brick thus intermingled! In a Space but half sufficient! A force created of unknown, unthinkable power—immeasurable as that proverbial irresistible force meeting an immovable body. Two solid bodies here, intermingled to their very essence, striving to occupy the same space at the same time!

Brutar was drawing at me. "Look at them, Rob! Trying to get at it! And up there—and down below—see them?"

The glowing bricks were lodged up and down the building—all seemingly on the one side. Down underground, lodged in the very foundations of the structure I could see three of them piled together. And frantic shapes of men digging for them through the walls of the cellars.

"Come further away, Rob. We can see it better from a distance. It should be very interesting."

We retreated, going back until again we were standing just beneath the level of City Hall Park. Brutar's men gathered around us—two hundred ghosts clustered there watching the fruit of their diabolical efforts. There were soldiers with machine guns in the park. The guns impotently, ridiculously, were trained upon us. And around the edge of the park a

cordon of police kept back the crowds. I wondered what time of night it might be. Evening, possibly; and then I saw the spectral clock of the little tower of the squat City Hall. It was just before midnight.

Our march, perhaps not so much sinister as weird to the public, had drawn a jam of the morbidly curious to this part of the city. They were packed everywhere. And all the normal activities of the city were stopped. No traffic on the streets. Vehicles motionless.

The great Woolworth Building stood like the ghost of some grave giant, serene, majestic in the power of its size. Its summit up there in the gloom seemed lighted; spots of blurred light were everywhere within it.

The whole scene of shadows seemed unreal. Like a dream. But as I saw those frantic figures scrambling within the threatened building, hacking futilely at its foundations to try and remove in time those dim, glowing bricks materializing from another realm—the stark, strange reality of it all was forced upon me.

We waited. How long I cannot say. Spectators of two realms, each to the other mere ghosts, standing there watching and waiting. For a time nothing happened throughout all the scene. And then a change was apparent in the crowds about the park. No longer were they watching us, the ghosts, but they were eyeing now the Woolworth Building. At first curiously, incredulous to believe the news which was spreading about. Then restlessly, and then, as orders evidently were passed to the troops and to the policemen, these began pushing and shoving at the people. The crowd resisted at first; moved reluctantly. Then a fear seemed to surge over them—

fear growing to panic. They began trying to run—waves of them everywhere surging in panic away from the doomed building.

Hundreds went down underfoot, trampled upon in the streets by their fellows, mad, insane now with fear. And from every nearby building its occupants came tumbling out like frightened rats; scurrying out to join the panic of the streets. A chaos everywhere....

And we ghosts stood quiet and serene in its midst.

Brutar murmured. "Watch the great house. They know it is doomed. See, they have stopped their efforts in there—now at the last, trying to save themselves."

The Woolworth Building was emptying.... Abandoned....

Breathlessly I stood and gazed upon the ghostly scene. The tremendous building towered there motionless. But presently I fancied it stirred; its graceful roof up there seemed swaying.... Shifting.... Or was it a trick of my straining vision? But then I saw it was not, for palpably the tower swayed.... Leaned. Further—leaning until all at once I knew it could not recover.... Poised, and then was toppling.

A breathless instant. Slowly at first, like a felled forest giant, the great structure was coming down. Slowly, then with a rush it fell to the south—fell in great shattering segments. Crashed with a soundless crash upon the several blocks of nearby buildings. Crashed and tore with the thousands of tons of its weight, smothering everything beneath its crashing masonry and steel.... A soundless chaotic scene of ruin and death over all those city blocks, with huge rising clouds of dirt and smoke mercifully to obscure it.



CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESCUING ARMY

I stood gaping, every sense within me shuddering at that soundless scene of ruin and death. And then it came upon me that now I could escape. Brutar had turned triumphantly to his underlings. I heard his voice: "The first success! Now let us try the others!"

No one seemed to be noticing me. I turned and swept myself away into the darkness....

I was aware of the grey outlines of New York floating by above me.... A dim idea was in my mind that I must rejoin Will and Thone....

Out there beneath the Westchester hills the silent mob of Brutar's ghostly followers still waited. Near them was the main body of his army, inactive, waiting here while he with his chosen few were experimenting upon New York!

Experimenting! This little experimental test, and it had brought down the Woolworth Building! What then would they do with a general attack?

I passed around the mob—silent, fleeing spectres—and sped again into darkness. With no conscious thought of passing time, or direction to my flight. Yet there must have been some instinct to guide me. The thought of Bee came strong. A growing triumph, a relief, told me I was nearing her; and I think now that it was her thought of me which guided my flight.

Darkness. But overhead lay the shadows of my own world. Winding grey hills; towns that lay like grey, colorless pictures in a book, queerly distorted as I looked, upward and through them....

Shadows like myself were advancing from the gloom in front of me! A little group; behind them a vague sweep of shapes stretching out to seem a throng, a multitude. Thone! Will and Bee—with the rescuing army of the Big-City behind them!

The rescuing army....

There came upon me with that meeting a great surging knowledge of my love for Bee. My love, born up there in my own world. And then, in the realm of the Egos, stripped of the physical, a changed love which had faded to a vague affection—a knowledge that she was dear to me, but nothing more.

Now—in the Borderland once more, at least of half-material substance, a very human love descended in a torrent. My arms went around her.

"Bee, my darling." And she responded to my caresses, kissing me with an eagerness, a longing undisguised. "Rob! I've been so frightened, not having you—" Murmured then that she loved me; and clung to me.... The threshold of our own world.

But it was no time for love-making. I told Thone and Will what was transpiring, what already had come to pass, down there in New York. And with them we presently swept forward to the rescue.

Thone's army was at least as large as Brutar's; and it was not, like his, burdened by those who could not fight. In orderly array it advanced, and soon ahead of us we saw the shapes of Brutar's forces.

Strange ghostly battle into which now we plunged! I did not, could not fully understand it at the time—but now I think I do. The very essence of it a physical inactivity. Fighting! The word to our Earthly minds is so full of movement! Yet a man battling with himself, pitting the good against the evil within himself, may sit in his easy chair and fight a fierce fight.

So it was here; unleashed forces of the mind, grappling silently—a struggle without rules of combat in which no quarter could be given, and which could only end by complete annihilation of one side or the other. I knew all this, and standing with Bee, Thone and Will on a dark eminence above the scene, I watched, breathlessly.

We were under that same little Westchester town. Its streets and houses lay shadowy above us. Ghostly people were up there—thronging the streets—gazing down with fear and awe at these flowing masses of ghosts advancing to battle.

The mob of Brutar's followers, frightened now, were huddled compactly. In area, they spread under perhaps half the village. And around them in a great concentric ring, Brutar's fighters massed. This movement Thone did not disturb.

"Let them," he said. "It's what I wish, to have them massed like that."

From our eminence—we were poised not very far beneath the ground level—we could see over the whole area of the battle which was proceeding below us. The central mob who could

not fight; the ring of Brutar's soldiers; and surrounding that, at a distance of some five hundred feet, another ring, Thone's fighters who now were massing to the attack.

"What will they do?" I murmured. But no one answered me, and soon I was answered by the scene itself. From both sides—Thone's army and Brutar's—little waves of the Thought-substance were flowing out over that segment between the opposing rings. Like slow-floating wisps of grey smoke from the heads of the fighters. Flowing across the space between the lines. Materializing steadily. Solidifying until I could almost imagine it might become a grey wall. But this was an illusion. It was merely thought-antagonistic which would grip and hold like a net, no more.

The two opposing streams met in the center of that circular No-man's land between the lines. A chaos of blurred formless color was there. Not grey now. An angry red. The visible substances holding each other immovable. A boiling cauldron of red, with livid, lurid tongues like flame darting from it.

No sound. But I could feel it. A mental distress, as even at this distance its influence swept me. An uneasiness; a depression; a vague sense within me of a growing panic.

It seemed a deadlock. And then began movement; strategic movement. From one portion of his line Thone suddenly withdrew a number of his thinkers. They came sweeping around to our side. With this reinforcement we became stronger over here, and the red chaos surged inward. I saw it flow almost to engulf the crouching Brutar fighters who were here opposing it. Saw a few of them fall—ghostly shells lying inert—and above them a something luminous, the Ego-mind

deranged, unhinged, hovering, then winging away into death....

A shape hurriedly approached us; a man with harried, anxious face. "Thone! We are too weak now upon the other side. The Red Death is almost upon us there! They want the thinkers back."

Thone ordered them back. He turned to me. "We will win, Rob."

But I could not see it so.

"Look!" He gestured. "There is a haze above the red. It passes inward—can't you see that? And they cannot stop it. They have not been trained, for they do not know what it is."

Above the red seething ring, where the opposing thoughts were meeting, I saw as he said, a haze. It seemed a dim purple. It was floating up and inward. Very tenuous, hardly to be noticed. An imponderable something.

Thone said, "A quality of our thought which they cannot combat since they do not know what it is—or realize perhaps its presence. But its influence will reach them in time."

He swung upon the attentive shapes near us. "Oh!—give orders not to hasten. Hold the deadlock. Keep them there. Do not hasten. We must drive up the others if we can. Brutar and the others—"

Brutar! His few picked men down there in New York working death and destruction! I had forgotten them completely.

Thone issued other orders. "If thoughts of distress come from here—let the thoughts out. They may reach Brutar—bring him back to help his battle here. Let out their thoughts that

way." He gestured toward New York. "And if we drive Brutar and his men up here, let them in."

Other orders. A hundred or two of our fighters withdrew from the line. One here and there, ceasing to fight, coming toward Thone, forming behind us. A picked force with which we were to descend into New York.

And soon, leaving the scene here, we sped under the grey shadows of Westchester, southward toward the city. And in time, came upon it. New York! Splendid giant. Like some great helpless lion standing harried. Cuffed, wounded, stricken. Unable to fight back. Amazed, bewildered, yet undaunted, ready to fight.

But helpless.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRICKEN CITY

The little glowing bricks had been spread in scores of places. The acres of tumbled masonry which once reared aloft in proud splendor—the Woolworth Building—lay still smoking. Other buildings were down. Lower Manhattan—its pile of monuments to the engineering skill of man—was interspersed with areas of ruin. A smoke pall hung over everything. Through it as we arrived I saw another giant building come down....

A warship lay in the upper harbor. Small boats were clustered around it. Over its decks and within its structure, men were frantically rushing. It stood there, a shadow on the shadowy water, the embodiment of impregnable power; the small anxious boats around it like milling pygmies trying futilely to help its distress.

Then men began pouring from it. The little boats took them and made off. Alone it lay there. Motionless. Then there came a surge of its giant bulk upward—a torrent waterspout as of a great mine exploding beside it. Bow down, it began to sink.

The Statue of Liberty fell. Head down, with torch plunging like a falling symbol....

The great Fort Wadsworth guarding the Narrows, as though an earthquake had torn it apart, rose and shook itself and fell into a shapeless mass. A small police boat was scurrying by in a panic. The tumbling white waves engulfed it....

The Brooklyn Bridge lay broken and fallen. Its dangling cables hung like rent cobwebs ripped apart by a giant, ruthless hand.... Figures of men were clinging to parts of it.

Death, destruction everywhere. But there were soldiers grimly standing in Battery Park. Machine guns idly standing. Another warship, unattacked, belching belligerent smoke, moving majestically around the Battery from one river to another.

A harried lion. Undaunted. But helpless to fight.

Beneath the shadows of the lower Hudson we came upon Brutar and his clustered cohorts. The devastation was slackening; the bricks had done their work. Brutar was doubtless thinking of rejoining his people up there under the little Westchester town. He saw our shapes, and started north. We followed. Urging him on, but not attacking.

Thone began, "Once we get them all together up there—all of them together—" But he did not finish.

Our lines let them through. It was a crescent battle line now, open to the south. But when Brutar swept in we closed it as before.

The scene here had changed somewhat since we left it. The lurid red of the opposing thought-streams still held balanced between the lines of the fighters. But in one place it was indented now far into Brutar's territory—a red gash like a wound gaping amid his huddled throng. And I noticed, too,

that the dim purple haze hung now like an aura close above the heads of our enemies.

I asked Thone about it. He said, "Those who are not fighters in there are beginning to feel our thoughts. Perhaps even they begin to suspect what awaits them. Soon the fighters also will know."

He spoke quietly, but on a note of calm certainty that in the end we would triumph. From that same height we watched the scene. Almost immovable, struggling ghosts—grey translucent shapes to my vision as now I regarded them. Yet—I wondered—were not those shapes of Brutar's people more solid than our own? A vague shudder mingled with triumph unholy, swept over me. Was it fancy, or was there indeed a change?

I could see Brutar, or at least a shape I assumed to be his, raised upon a height in the center of his forces; his arms waving; his soundless voice doubtless exhorting his fighters to greater effort. The fog of purple haze swirled about him, tinting, but not obscuring, for it seemed utterly transparent. Was it my fancy that Brutar's shape was of changing aspect?

And then I was aware of an uneasiness growing in the mob huddled there in the midst of the fighting. A stirring. A ripple of movement. Spreading like the ripples of a pebble thrown into a pond; spreading until abruptly the mob was surging, struggling to break the bonds of its own protecting ring of fighters.

The fighters felt the press of the throng behind them. Their efforts wavered. With diverted minds their thought-stream weakened. At once the red tumult moved in upon them.

But Thone called his orders and a score of shapes relayed them throughout our circular investing ring. I could not understand it. We were not to press our advantage. Our fighters lessened visibly the strength of their attack. And our antagonists in a moment recovered.

Thone said quietly, "No, Rob—if we were to force in there now and overwhelm them, there would be many minds unhinged, but not driven irrevocably away. They might return. It is my aim to destroy them completely—mind and body—annihilation!"

Savage purpose, savagely expressed! But he added, "It is best—and I think, more merciful."

CHAPTER XX

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GHOSTS

There came presently a sudden change to this silent battle. For the purely mental, abruptly was substituted a semblance of physical struggle. The two mingled. In the Ego-world it would not have been possible; but here in the Borderland, these bodies of half-material substance abruptly found themselves capable of it. From physical immobility there sprang movement. A panic at first; but Brutar quelled it, organized it into a concerted rush. His mob, his fighters, began pressing forward in a single direction. The Borderland slope lay well beneath the ground level of the village overhead; but off to the left there seemed an area in the outskirts of the town where the slope and the ground of Earth reached a common level. And Brutar's people were pressing that way.

They surged forward; were forced back—surging and rebounding as one would press against a yielding but entangling net. Our lines, and theirs, and the red tumult of conflict surged with them; bending, but the whole scene holding its contour. And I saw that very slowly, with each forward sweep and rebound they were gaining in their direction.

I heard Thone beside me addressing Will. "They will never make it. They will be too late." He seemed to realize something. "Those people up there in the town, Will—they must escape! Abandon the town! All of them escape—now before it's too late!"

Will said, "If we could only communicate with them. Do you suppose we could?" And Bee eagerly put in, "Let's try. Let Rob and me try. We will go up there to the level."

They explained it all to me then. Horrible, sinister, shuddering outcome! Grewsome! Of course, the Earth-people in the town must escape....

Bee and I together took ourselves up the Borderland slope to the outskirts of the village where the slope was level with the ground. We were now half a mile beyond this spectral town which was thronged with ghostly vehicles and ghostly people staring in wonderment down at the battle scene.

We came to the common level, stood upon a spectral road with a few wraiths of houses lining it. There seemed no people here—they were all crowding the town to gaze at the struggling ghosts directly beneath them there.

"No one is around here, Bee." But no sooner had I said it than we saw, standing by a fence nearby, a ghost warily regarding us. A man in uniform, a State trooper I thought. He appeared, standing there alone, to have no desire to approach us. But I waved. And Bee waved. We carefully advanced upon him—carefully, for fear of startling him into flight. Gesturing, smiling with every effort to appear friendly. He understood us at last; came to the middle of the road, and there we joined him.

Fantastic meeting! Ghosts, all of us, standing there in a group, gesturing. I put out my hand as a friend, and his came to meet it. Touched it? Had a billion million miles of Space and Eons

of Time been between us we could hardly have been further apart!

But at last we made him understand. An ingenious fellow! He took a shadowy paper and pencil from his pocket and wrote what he thought we intended to convey to him; and we read it and nodded and smiled—grimly, for this was grim business indeed—grim, horrible!

When at last he knew, astonishment, terror was upon him. And he was off down the road at a run, waving his arms, shouting no doubt, screaming to everyone his terrible warning....

We rejoined Thone upon the height overlooking the struggle. He murmured, "I see you were successful. And just in time—this is almost over now."

The battle lines still held. But what a change was come to our enemies! There was no mistaking it now—their bodies were materializing. The purple haze carrying the malignant influence of our fighters, was forcing their bodies into the Earth-state!...

The town above us, warned by our messenger was emptying. Vehicles—shadowy moving shapes of cars and wagons—were scurrying out of it over all the roads. The houses were empty; the roads all thronged with fugitives on foot. Empty-handed; and families trudging with what little worldly goods they could carry in their arms. Wagons and cars piled high with household furnishings hastily rescued. The lines of pedestrians urged, lashed to greater haste by frightened officials. An exodus from death into safety....

The end came suddenly, unexpectedly swiftly. Thousands of ghostly bodies, there beneath the ground of the village abruptly leaping over the last gap into material being. *In the ground*—the earth, the rock—the very atoms of these foreign bodies intermingled, blended to their essence with the atoms of the rock and soil. And suddenly leaping into solidity....

The scene everywhere seemed to shudder. Its grey details slurred into a blur, a formless chaos of power unleashed. A soundless rumble; a sweep of tumbling movement. Upward, with a burst; an infinity of newly created entities demanding space. Space! Demanding it; heaving upward over the path of least resistance to find it....

As though, there in the bowels of the earth a pent-up volcano had suddenly broken forth, the abandoned village heaved into the air; rose, shattered apart, and fell in a tumbled waste. An earthquake, a very cataclysm of nature outraged....

A shattered, tumbled mass of wreckage where a moment before there had been a village.... Fire leaped to the last destruction.... Smoke rolled up in great spiraling clouds....

And visible, down beneath the ruin, a ring of victorious shimmering ghosts, standing awed and alone in the empty darkness....

CHAPTER XXI

EACH TO HIS OWN ALLOTTED PORTION

We stood in the Borderland with Thone and Ala.

"You will not return to our Ego-world?" said Thone. It was a statement in tone, rather than a question. "You are right, friends. Each to his own, as the Creator intended. Your world, better for you—but ours, best of them all, for us."

Ala was standing close by Will. So near was she to our Earth-state, here in the Borderland, that I knew she had felt for Will those stirrings we call love. And now she was fighting them.

He touched her. "Could you not find it best to come with my sister and me, Ala?"

But she shook her head. "No. Father speaks truth. One should hold in contentment his allotted portion." But I think it tore at her with a new, very human temptation. "Good-bye," she said resolutely.

It wrenched at us all. Friendship, even over so brief an interval, cannot be lightly broken. We told ourselves we would not break it. Some day, some time, we would again come together.

"Good-bye." Soundlessly it echoed within us. Will, Bee and I stood silent as we watched them trudge away into the shadows and the darkness.

Each to his own allotted portion.

Thone had assured us that our natural tendency of body would be to resume an Earth-existence from this adjacent Borderland. And Will had formerly returned and found it easier than staying. We located, after roaming a time, that corner of Will's own garden where the ground level of Earth coincided with the Borderland slope....

Solidity! Again—at last—we were solid, human—wraiths no longer. Will had gone on into the house; Bee and I lingered in the garden. Blessed sounds and sights and odors. We could hear the murmur of insect life; hear the night breeze stirring the leaves, feel it fanning our hot cheeks. The roses and honeysuckle were heavily, thrillingly odorous. The moon bathed us with its pale silver fire.

I took Bee in my arms. She came, willingly, eagerly, trembling with this new-found world of love. And returned my kisses, and clung to me.

"Each to his own, Bee darling. How good this world of ours seems! I never appreciated it before. Did you?"

"No! No, never!"

But I appreciated it now.

THE END

[The end of *Into the Fourth Dimension* by Ray Cummings]