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MAY

# Weird Tales

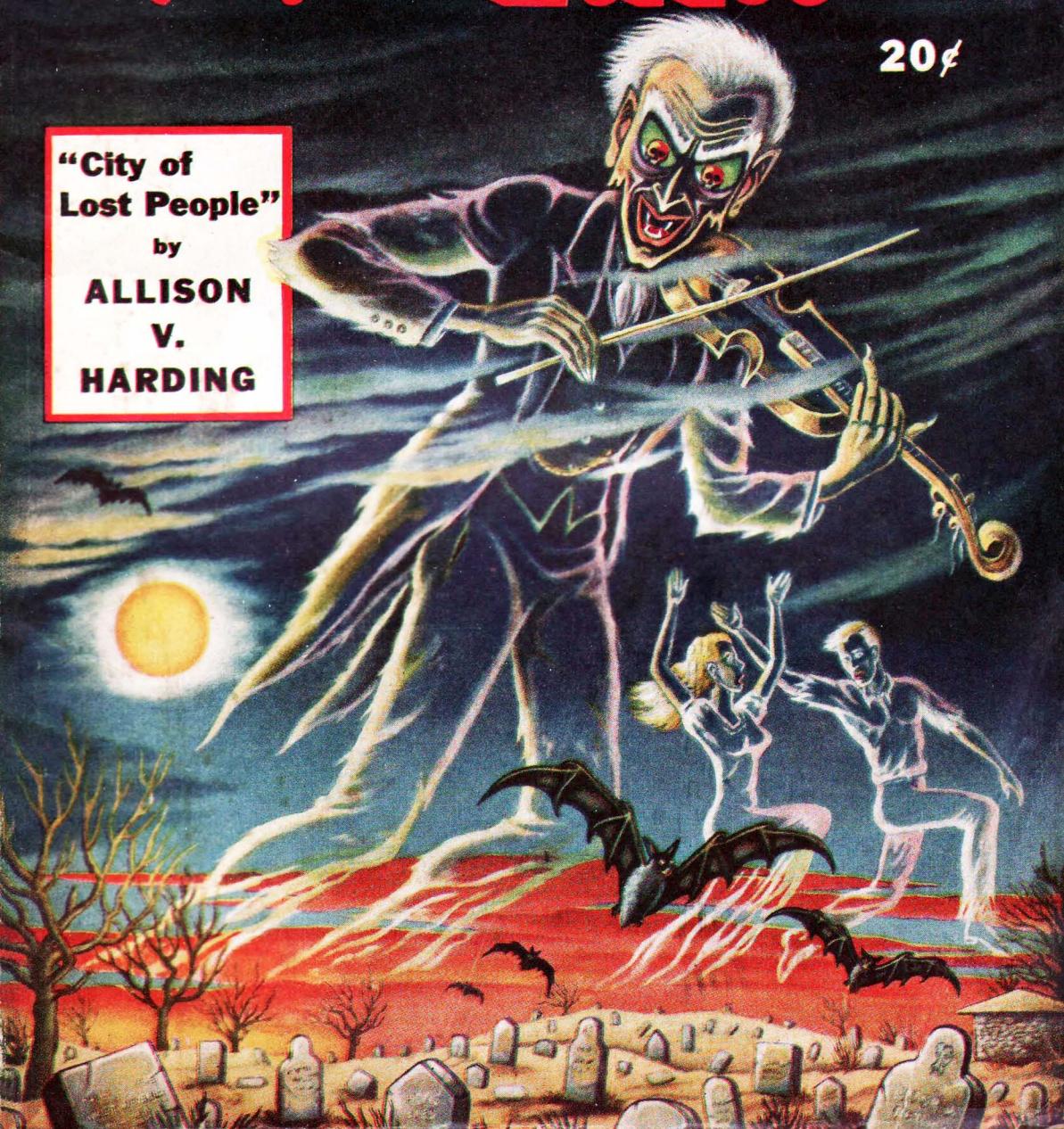
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**"City of  
Lost People"**

by

**ALLISON  
V.  
HARDING**



# Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1948

Cover by Matt Fox

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# City of Lost People

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

EDGAR CHADBOURNE laid the last of his office work aside, tidied his small desk and rose in the empty office to put on his coat. It was not the first time he had worked late, well past the time when the others went streaking to their five o'clock buses and subways and trains.

But these things happened to Chadbourne. He was a man more worthy than the humble job he held, and there always seemed to be some office overflow toward the end of the day that inevitably spilled onto his desk, and inevitably he would be sitting there while some of the other assistants went whooping out the door calling back, "You don't mind, Edgar, old boy! It'll keep you out of mischief!"

Edgar was a medium-sized, usual-featured individual, undiscovered in most any crowd, lonely and unsociable because of shyness, but far from stupid. He knew the little office joke about "Workhorse" Chadbourne and "He's a good man to help me make my 5:10 train." It was just that he didn't mind.

He was single, in his middle thirties. All he had in the way of relatives and family were three or four states across the country. He had nothing much to go home to but a furnished room in a walk-up brownstone, and his books. So it was neither a new nor distasteful experience for him to be carefully putting the last lights of the office out, thumbing the door closed behind him, feeling that it was locked and ringing the elevator bell on a now totally empty floor.

And as it did each night, all of his prob-

lems fell away from his mind and he thought instead about the interesting psychology book that he was reading. The subject was one of his favorites.

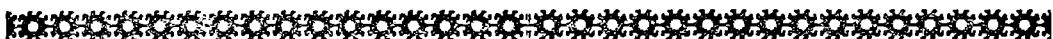
The elevator came then. Chadbourne turned suddenly, feeling the pain in his knee, still cranky after that heavy fall a month ago. He stepped aboard the empty car, preoccupied with his own thoughts. The lobby of the Becker Tower was deserted. Even the elevator starter seemed to have strolled off, perhaps for a cup of coffee. Edgar noted the time automatically on the large wall dial. It was six twenty-five.

He went through the revolving door into the street, and the cold winter air hit him with an impact. His steps automatically took the right direction. His mind was still taken up with the book he'd been reading. He was a block and a half from the Becker Tower before he noticed it. First he was merely curious. Then with a growing wonder as he looked around and every which way. Another half block and he'd reached Main Avenue, one of the big city thoroughfares, and then he stopped completely.

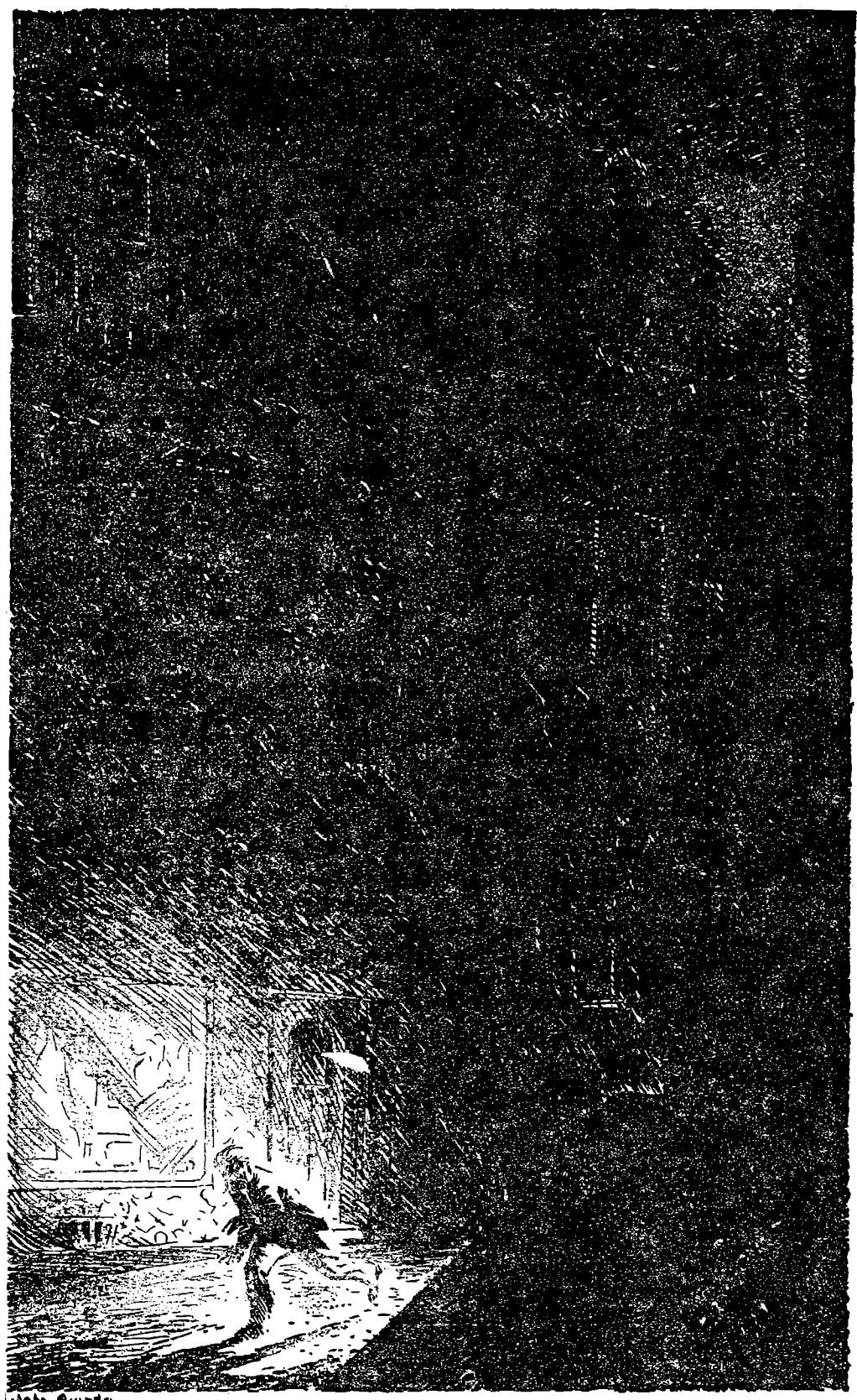
AT THIS hour it was possible but not probable that the street in front of the Becker Tower would be empty. But Main Avenue! Yet instead of the busy, bustling throngs that usually packed the sidewalks so that you had to thread your way carefully through them, there was tonight . . . no one! No one as far as his eyes could see.

Edgar crossed with the light and walked two blocks further along the avenue. At a corner he came upon a long, red bus. It

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA



*Have you ever walked into the streets at rush hour and found  
no one . . . no one, abroad?*



John Giunta

was lighted, but quite empty. Unconsciously he quickened the tempo of his steps, and for the first time he noticed the loud sound his heels made as they came down on the pavements. Why, he'd walked on Main Avenue at midnight and in the small hours of the morning, and always . . . always there were at least a few people!

The stores with their garish front-lighting bordered the right of way. The street lights blazed with their double sockets and the traffic signals turned red and green and red and green again with their usual precision. It was then that the curiousness and wonderment were joined by a new feeling. What if . . . what if something catastrophic had happened! His mind raced at full-time, breakneck speed.

He had been in his office almost an hour and a half after the others had left. Suppose—he was not at all sure just what had occurred. He wondered wildly at the possibilities of atomic action by some enemy force. Gas perhaps, but he smelled nothing. The night air was clean and cold.

His palms and forehead were moist despite the chilliness of the air, and Chadbourne's strides were just short of a run. He came upon his customary news dealer. There was the brown-painted shack, the not-so-neat rows of innumerable magazines vying for public interest, and the frontespiece of the shack flat and open with its three or four evening papers—and he came closer and looked; they were the late-evening editions laid out in rows, a piece of clothesline with a weight at the end across them to keep them from blowing and a handful of pennies and nickels left by hurried purchasers as they reached, grabbed and ran.

But Nick, the old paper-seller who'd just had a piece on himself in the Sunday supplement for having been on this very corner for forty-two years—Nick was gone!

Chadbourne hurried on. He turned off Main Avenue, and on the side streets passed several fashionable restaurants usually flush with people at this hour, but their brightly colored glass-paneled doors stood immobile, and once when he stepped close to peer inside at one softly lighted barroom, he saw it was empty, the regimented stools uninhabited.

Next Chadbourne found himself run-

ning. It was a delusion, he told himself, but the more he tried to reason, the harder he ran as though by so doing he would finally catch up with the others, be among them again. There must be a logical explanation for all this. His pounding heart and rapid breathing finally slowed him to a fast walk again.

**H**E PASSED the el structure, looked up the stairs that led to the money-changers' booth. The booth was lit, he could see from here. He could also tell it was empty. He went on, and each new sight turned his stomach into a tighter knot, beat his pounding heart into even greater efforts.

Here was his own block with the barber shop on the corner. Ah! Its striped electrical pole was working! He came abreast of the brightly lighted window and looked in. There were the three chairs, the shelf of varied-colored bottles of pomades and tonics; the bootblack's stool and the table of last month's magazines. But no one! No one at all!

Edgar fumbled for his key as he broke into a run again. His brownstone was here. It took him three tries to get the door open. He fell inside. He stopped then for a moment inside the door as though here would be some partial sanctuary against this thing he did not understand. He had three flights to go to his top-floor apartment, but Chadbourne had to rest.

And then he noticed something else. The ground-floor door opened past the apartment of a seamstress, and as he came in nights, he'd never failed to hear the whirring of her electric sewing machine. Never . . . never, that is before tonight, for inside here, it was even quieter than the great outdoors he'd just fled from, and he felt the quiet all around like a blanket as he mounted the stairs.

No Joplin kids whooping and being shushed by their mother on the second-floor-back. No hesitant saxophone player in the front trying to keep on key and off the nerves of the other rooms all at once.

Chadbourne's own and top floor was quiet anyway and that was a little less strange than all the other things that had happened, for it was always still here. He, Edgar, made little noise, and the doctor

who occupied the front was likewise no noisemaker.

He let himself into his back room-and-a-half, sat down on the bed and held his head in trembling hands. The room was its customary prosaic self, and that served to make him feel somewhat better. "I've got to hold onto myself," Edgar repeated over and over in his mind. He laughed shakily, sat up, and then stretched out full length. Perhaps a nap would help. This experience had an explanation! Of that he was sure. It had something to do with his fall!

\* He remembered that night over four weeks ago well. He'd stepped out in the hall, planning to go downstairs and out for a newspaper and a pack of cigarettes. The carpet on the top step was loose. He'd known and forgotten. His feet went out from under him and he pitched headlong down the long flight, coming to a shuddering stop against the wall of the second floor.

WHEN he'd opened his eyes—for he'd lost consciousness—Mrs. Joplin was holding his battered head in her lap. Her two children, for once speechless, standing wide-eyed beside him, and Dr. Kessler, the aged physician from the third-floor-front was leaning over taking his pulse with one hand and passing a small vial of vapo-aromatics under his nose.

It was certainly nice, he had thought to himself as he lay there, that there was a doctor right in the house when he took his tumble. Mrs. Bessey, the proprietress of the building, appeared from her basement quarters, and between the three of them, they had gotten Chadbourne back up to his room and into bed.

"No," Dr. Kessler had opined. There was no necessity of calling an ambulance. Kessler was a psychiatrist, you know, and eminently qualified to take care of bumps on the head, even those resulting in a mild concussion, which was what he diagnosed this as. The only other apparent injury was a wrench of the knee.

Edgar got to know Kessler fairly well that night and the next few days. The doctor, waving away his patient's thanks, made a careful examination that evening,

gave Chadbourne a sedative and left a note at bedside suggesting that the young man stop in at his room the next morning when he awoke.

Chadbourne had felt so much better on waking up the following day that he almost hesitated to knock at the front portal. But that would seem ungrateful, he reasoned. As though expecting him, the door flew open at Edgar's first rap.

"Ah, come in, my young friend!"

The room was semi-dark as though Kessler was still denying the daylight. It was musty and book-lined. There was a black medical bag on a chair in the corner, bottles here and there.

Kessler himself was a medium-sized roundish man with a gray Van Dyke. His eyes were sharp, black, and those as well as other features, nose and mouth, seemed to come together.

"I just wanted to thank you, Doctor, for taking care of me last night. I seem to feel fine this morning."

The doctor bobbed his head with what, in the gloomy room, Chadbourne took to be approval. He stepped quickly to his black bag, took out a light and a neurological hammer. He shone the light in Chadbourne's eyes, first one, then the other. Then he made Edgar sit down and tested his reflexes.

"Aha!"

"What?" Chadbourne was somewhat startled at the doctor's exclamation.

"Now, now, there's nothing bad, my young friend"—the psychiatrist put away his neurological tools—"but you did, you know, take a bad fall and that was quite a blow on the head. Now, I want you take today easy. I'm going to give you some pills. No, no, my young friend, don't protest! You don't get up and jounce about right after a head injury like that unless you want unpleasant consequences!"

Chadbourne subsided, took the pills Kessler forced on him.

"I'll stop in and see you tonight after I get back from the hospital," the physician terminated their conversation in his precise, accented voice.

Edgar had gone to the phone then and called his office, telling them about the accident, and he spent most of that day

sleeping. It was dark when he woke up, starting slightly at the sight of Kessler standing by his bed. The doctor mumbled some foreign phrase and then laid a reassuring hand on Chadbourne's shoulder.

"You seem much better, young man. Get a good sleep tonight and I think you'll be able to go back to work tomorrow."

CHADBOURNE thanked the doctor again and the next day he was back at the Becker Tower. Once or twice when he would pass Kessler on the stairs or run into him in the neighborhood the doctor would ask solicitously about him, and Chadbourne always replied, "I think I'm fine."

He did remark that occasionally he felt dizzy and at other moments would get a fleeting feeling of unreality. Kessler nodded his head sagely and said that was no more than to be expected.

"After all, you know," he commented, "that was a very heavy blow on the skull!"

As Chadbourne lay in his room this night, he wondered, as one will grasp at any straw, if possibly his strange experience was not due to some transient effect of his accident. Lulled by that thought he fell asleep.

He was awakened, he knew not how long afterward, by the sound of one of Mrs. Joplin's children screaming at the other. He started up off his bed, and then the whole dreadful nightmare of that earlier evening came back to him so forcibly that he threw open the door into the hall, took several steps down toward the second flight and peered through the bannisters.

He could hear Mrs. Joplin soothing the children now, and then her door opened and one of them shot out as though from a catapult and raced down the stairs to the street floor.

Chadbourne turned, relief swelling his heart, and took the steps back up to his own landing. It was then that he noticed the black square of the opposite apartment. The door was open and framed in darkness he saw Dr. Kessler watching him. For a moment Edgar had an impulse to go over to the psychiatrist and tell him what had happened earlier, but for some reason he could not quite understand, he resisted it,

waving his hands instead and returning to his own room.

He puttered around idly preparing some soup, crackers, and fruit for his late supper, for it was now, his wristwatch showed, half-past eight. He noticed suddenly as he ate, that one of the books on his bed table appeared to have been disturbed. It was open midway through the volume.

This reading matter was Kessler's. Chadbourne had more-than-the-average-layman's interest in psychology, and the physician had fairly forced several books on him. All Kessler's volumes seemed to be English translations of exotic foreign works. The open book was entitled, "Occult Factors in Psychology."

As he placed another cracker in his mouth, Edgar leaned forward and saw the paragraph marked with red pencil. Probably something Kessler had done for his own reference. His eyes took in the short paragraph.

"It is quite obvious then that the state called Life and the states called Living are intangibles, which although requiring much to disprove in terms of what are called biological entities, require far more to prove. If Mind is paramount in man, then Life is Mind, and Living a state of Mind. And all these arbitrary symbols leaving no true meaning or mark in the sands of eternity."

EDGAR CHADBOURNE read the paragraph over twice and then a third time. He did not know that he quite understood it, but there was a thought there, an enormous thought, he felt. Apparently Kessler had thought so too, to outline in red pencil.

Chadbourne wondered casually how the book had come open in that spot. It was the latest one the physician across the hall had given him. He hadn't, as yet, started it. Perhaps he'd jounced the book when he'd come into his room earlier and it had fallen open to this place. He dismissed the episode and went back to his light meal.

He was cleaning up the crumbs and running them down the small porcelain basin in the corner of his room when the light tapping came on the door. Even before he turned the knob, he knew who it was.

"Ah," said the physician, "and how are you feeling?"

"Pretty good," said Chadbourne.

"Fine! I tell you, I wanted to borrow back one of those books I loaned you. A thousand pardons, but there are some references I need."

Edgar inclined his head. "Why sure!"

Kessler's eyes flicked around the room and lit on the bedside table.

"There it is! I see you've been reading it."

The doctor stepped closer and scooped up the volume, cradling it in the crook of his elbow as if it were an only child.

"What did you think of it and that particular passage?"

"Oh, that business about Life and Living? Why I don't know that I quite understood it, Dr. Kessler."

"Ah, no. No, I dare say you didn't, my young friend." The physician laughed.

It was the first time Chadbourne had ever heard him laugh, and it was a small, unconvincing sound, brittle in the room, showing tiny yellowing teeth as the lips curled back.

The psychiatrist had turned for the door when Edgar spoke.

"Doctor, there's something I want to mention to you. I had the strangest experience of my life this evening when I left the office."

He told of what had happened, of leaving the Becker Tower, of walking out onto the street, a completely empty, desolate street, and of the trip home through lighted, lonely, city caverns, of this arrival here and the emptiness of the house terminating in his nap, and then everything was all right again.

Although the episode now, even though it was only a few hours ago, seemed as remote as a last week's nightmare, Chadbourne still wanted to hear some word of reassurance. By itself it was a shocking experience. There must . . . must be an explanation. But it was so terribly real, this unreality of loneliness, and could you . . . could you, Doctor, deceive yourself into *not seeing* people on the street, for they must have been there! It was from his fall, wasn't it? From his blow on the head and nothing of any importance? What did the doctor think?

Kessler looked at the young man for

what seemed to Chadbourne like a long time. Then he said simply, "Yes, of course," and departed abruptly.

Edgar sat down. Well, he'd told a doctor. Some of these foreigners were abrupt and taciturn. That was Kessler's way of reassurance. If there'd been anything wrong, he would have said so. The "Yes, of course," was, Edgar supposed, Kessler's way of saying, "Oh, that's to be expected. That's all right!" Chadbourne dismissed the matter from his mind.

IT WAS two weeks later, in the middle of winter, that Edgar walked from the Tower one evening with Fred Jones, a co-worker. They talked about this and that. Fred griped about their employer, and as they came abreast of a tobacconist's, slapped Chadbourne on the shoulder.

"Just a second, Edgar. I'm going to slip in and get myself some smokes. Be right with you."

Edgar nodded and stood at the side of the busy sidewalk watching the people pass. A pretty girl went by, making him think of Kathy at home. He tried not to think of her much. She was so intense about her music and her teaching. His own interest in her and theirs for each other had to wait. That was one of the reasons why he'd left the family and come a thousand miles here to the city.

He turned then and looked at the tobacco shop's small window with its well-planned displays of pipes and tobacco tins and smoking pouches. There were tiny lights hung by slender cords in rows of five lighting the objects. They dazzled him as he looked.

He turned away blinking, still seeing the tiny lights in his eyes, and looked at the gaily gold-colored door of the shop. He stepped forward wondering what was keeping Fred, opened the door and took two steps past the threshold.

The musical tinkle of the store's mechanism was still ringing as he stood there, his eyes sweeping the small shop. There was no one . . . no one inside! Here on the near counter was a newspaper and a carton of cigarettes. It was the evening paper that Fred had bought in the lobby of the Becker Tower folded as he folded it to

shove under his arm, and Fred's brand of smokes.

Edgar stepped further into the shop, and this time keeping his voice level, he called out, "Fred! Fred!"

No answer.

There were three counters, one on either side and another along the far or back wall. Chadbourne stepped carefully around each one, feeling with his arms. It made a part of his mind remember that picture years ago. What was it? "The Invisible Man?" But he had to make sure. He felt nothing!

The modernistic clock over the cigarette-holder display said five-fifteen. He opened the street door and went out, trying to keep the panic out of his body, trying not to notice that he was utterly alone again on one of the busiest streets in the city at the height of the evening rush hour.

He walked home and arrived there with his face damp with sweat. Again he opened the downstairs door and listened for the sounds of the seamstress, only to know and to find that there were no sounds. He climbed the stairs, and the never-quiet Joplins, as they'd once been called by Mrs. Bessey, were interred in their apartment in deathlike silence.

He made the top floor and his own room, sat on his bed, finally lay down and tried to sleep. That's what he'd done before, he remembered so well. But this time sleep would not come.

Desperately, he reached for the small, black-headed bottle Kessler had given him. There were sedatives there, and he pulled out the cotton with clumsy fingers, swallowed a white capsule from inside hurriedly.

He lay down again, and after a while, slipped into a fitful slumber. He awoke later with a start, drenched with sweat, but the only sound was the heavy beats of his own heart. His wristwatch said it was nine-thirty.

**H**E OPENED the door of his room and stood in the hall, looking down between the bannisters. The small, yellow bulbs of the rooming house lit the steps and the landings, but the house was silent. He went down the stairs two at a time, forgetting his fall, throwing caution to the

winds. He raced into the street hatless and coatless.

Here was the barber shop . . . empty! He turned the corner and sped toward the blinking movie marquee two blocks away, his mouth moving as he read out players and the film showing. He stopped under the marquee. There was no nine-thirty line! There were no people going in. He looked in the brightly lighted ticket window. Empty! Red tickets spooled at the side waiting for purchasers who did not come.

Edgar looked at himself in a long, full-length mirror next to "Coming Attractions," and the blinking marquee as it lit up "Central Street Palace," C-E-N-T-R-A-L, and so on, the lights lighting up one by one and then all together. He looked gray and old in the mirror, and suddenly it occurred to him from things he'd read and his own imagination that he was dead and this was death!

He ran all the way back to his building, mounted the stairs to the second floor almost as fast as he'd come down a few moments before. His breath rasped in his throat and his temples pounded. His stomach was sick and he felt as if he were going to lose consciousness.

Edgar's shoulder hit the wall phone there, and desperately he grabbed it, took down the hard rubber receiver. He slipped a nickel in and made the long dial to operator. It took three rings and then the suspense was over. A voice said, "Your call, please!" and Chadbourne nearly whimpered with relief.

He gave his home number a thousand miles away in the country and fumbled in his pocket furiously for change. As he began to feed quarters into the machine, his fingers steadied and he thought of his mother and his younger brother and the road that wound through the plains towards the red-shingled house, the fields of wheat and the high brown fences that stood against the sky.

And he thought of Kathy.

It took a long time and then his mother's voice answered. She was pleased but surprised. She knew what his salary was, and long-distance calls for no particular reason were a bit expensive. But Edgar's relief was worth it. He asked about everybody and

said—there had to be some reason—that he was going to come home for Easter.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Edgar! We'll be so glad to see you and so will Kathy!"

He hung up then, and an unmistakable voice at his side said, "Calling home, young man?"

It was Dr. Kessler. He'd come unheard up the stairs from the street and now stood at Chadbourne's elbow, his little black eyes regarding the young man intently.

"Yes," said Edgar. "I was telling them I'm going to come home for Easter."

"Ah, home!" said Kessler. "Yes, of course!"

Chadbourne went on up the stairs to his room, feeling the psychiatrist's eyes following him as he went.

LATER that night Edgar collected the books of Kessler's he'd borrowed. He carried them under his arm across the hall to the physician's apartment. He noticed again that the psychiatrist opened the door after his first rap as though he'd been waiting for the visit.

"I wanted to return these, Doctor, and thank you for them."

"Thank you," murmured Kessler.

There was a moment's silence and Edgar shifted awkwardly, and then turned to go.

"Just a minute," the doctor put out a staying hand. "Are you sure you're feeling all right?"

"Why . . . why, yes!"

"I must say you don't look too well, Mr. Chadbourne."

"No? Well, I . . . to tell you the truth, Doctor, I had another one of those spells tonight. I came out of it with that phone call home just before you came up the stairs."

The physician nodded. "I thought as much. Young man, I'm going to suggest that you come up with me to the Institute tomorrow. It might be wise to have another examination up there. Say an X-ray and one or two other things."

Edgar protested, but Kessler would hear none of it.

"And not another word! I would be derelict in my professional duty were I not to follow your case up. After all, I was the attending physician."

Chadbourne argued weakly that he didn't

want to take any more time off from work and he was sure he was all right. Hadn't he, Dr. Kessler himself, said there was nothing of a serious nature?

"One cannot always be positive about such a hard fall as yours," the psychiatrist murmured. He waved away any further arguments.

Chadbourne was somewhat uneasy that night as he tried to sleep, and yet Kessler, in many ways, had been more than generous. Why, once when he, Edgar, had made mention of wanting to pay him something, the physician had replied brusquely that he'd "hear none of it!"

Edgar had thought at times of going to another doctor. Possibly getting his company down at the Becker Tower to recommend someone, but that seemed foolish. Kessler, he'd heard Mrs. Bessey say, was a very fine doctor from abroad with the best connections over here now. It was considered a great honor to be connected with the Institute north of the city.

THE next morning when Chadbourne went downstairs to the basement dining room where Mrs. Bessey served a frugal breakfast, Kessler was already waiting for him.

"Ah!" said the medical man, "and are we ready?"

"You really think I ought to go up there, Doctor?"

"Without question! One's health is too precious to take chances with, eh, young man?"

They drove up in a taxi and Kessler said hardly a word but looked out of the window at the panorama of city as they went north until they reached that great granite hospital structure built on the cliffs overlooking the river above the city. This was the Institute.

They stopped at an entrance. The bronze plaque said Wing A Psychiatric. Wing B Neurological. Wing C Psychopathic. Kessler led the way inside and they walked down many long clean-smelling halls, during the course of which nurses and other doctors passed, some of them nodding to Kessler. But he always seemed faintly aloof from them.

They took an elevator and entered a passageway over which was a blue light and the

words, "Disturbed Ward." A few yards down from the entrance, there was a desk with a lamp and a white-jacketed male nurse sitting behind it. He looked up, nodded at Kessler, went back to what he'd been doing.

Further along, there were rooms opening off the hall. Rooms without doors, and inside, Chadbourne, slowing down now so that he fell somewhat back of Kessler, could see people all dressed in the same shapeless gray tunics sitting on rough wooden chairs or cots or on the floor. Some of them still, others making meaningless motions with their hands or feet.

Occasionally there would be the whimpering sound of a cry or a shrill laugh. And then a white-coated male orderly would bustle in or out of one of the rooms. Kessler had stopped ahead and was waiting for him.

"I don't like this very much," Edgar said. "What's the idea of this tour you're taking me on?"

"Patience, young man. There is an interest about these things. Now, I want you to notice a subtle difference. We are stepping over a borderline."

He motioned the way they had come.

"Those other rooms had no doors. *Voila!* Now they do. Thick, padded doors, Chadbourne! And notice the difference in the sounds you will hear!"

They walked more slowly now, Kessler watching his reaction, and Edgar listened. The people they'd left behind had seemed poor, distraught, sad creatures.

But here from behind those closed doors whose secretiveness lent an added sense of ominousness, there came strange sounds . . . not recognizable to Chadbourne as human and yet he knew they must be. They were beast sounds . . . sounds of the unhuman and inhuman and sub-human.

Kessler peered closely at the identifying card on one of the closed doors, and abruptly took Chadbourne by the arm.

"Let me show you something." He opened the door and stepped inside, Edgar hesitantly following.

"Say, now look, Dr. Kessler, I haven't got the time. . . ."

"Come in here!" It was an order that demanded obedience. Chadbourne stepped inside, the door slowly latched behind. The room was a sameness everywhere. The walls

were of a heavy padded material as was the inside of the door. The bed was simple. There was a wooden table and a wooden chair, and that was all.

A window looked down onto the river and Kessler showed how it could be screwed out to a certain angle but no more, held in place by stiff iron arms, the opening not permitting the demented one to leap to the freedom of death onto the granite cliffs below.

Kessler sat on the little wooden chair then, and said, "Chadbourne, how would you like to be imprisoned here! Not very nice, eh?"

"Certainly not!" Edgar was becoming increasingly impatient and uneasy. "Can we get on with whatever that X-ray business was you had in mind. I'm not supposed to take this amount of time. . . ."

"Patience is not characteristic of the young," murmured Kessler. "However, being young, you are impatient so I suggest that you leave this room."

**C**HADBOURNE wondered at the abrupt turnabout but needed no second invitation. He went to the door to open it but his fingers found no latch or knob. Only the smooth buffing of the padding on the inside. The door was securely latched and there was no handle to turn it. What foolishness was this, anyway? Chadbourne turned back to the doctor, annoyed at his joke. Kessler was smiling that rare, strange smile of his, showing the little yellow teeth.

"I thought you would be interested to see how these people . . . what we call people . . . live, Chadbourne. I dare say you will always remember this room, eh, my young man? Ah, of course!"

He rose then quickly, stepped to the door and rapped on it loudly with the palm of his hand. In a moment there was a sound from outside, and Kessler repeated the signal. A hard-faced male orderly swung the portal open, nodding to Kessler and leering at Chadbourne as he did so.

The doctor hurried away along the passageway, Chadbourne following. They passed another desk where two orderlies sat, through a door and found themselves in a large airy, sun-filled room with tables and chairs and comfortable lounges.

"This is the physicians' dining room," Kessler explained. "Undoubtedly you find it considerably more pleasant. Possibly *they* would too!" He jerked his thumb back the way they'd come. "You will notice our windows here. See?" He stepped to one of them. "They open *all* the way!"

Chadbourne looked. They were the same type of French window as in the rest of the hospital, but they swiveled out normally. He looked down far below at the base of the hospital foundation and the granite rocks, beside which ran tracks of the South Shore Railroad.

A freight was picking up speed for the long haul out of the city. Edgar wondered how many times the inmates of the Institute peered through those locked windows, looked down and saw the trains going by. And if they had enough of their minds left to yearn for the freedom there below them.

Kessler snapped his fingers suddenly.

"You are all right! I have decided. I've been watching you closely. I shall not waste the city's money on an X-ray of your splendid skull!"

He made a little ironic bow. A rush of things came to Chadbourne's lips about wasting his time taking him through the Disturbed Ward, all these other incidentals.

But perhaps Kessler was right and knew best. And perhaps observing him on this circuitous route through the hospital was a part of his diagnosis, contributing to his decision more than medical examinations.

"I have some patients to see!"

Chadbourne thought there was a slight inflection on the word "patients," but it might have been his imagination.

"Take this hall and the elevator at its end."

A curt bob of the head signified goodbye and the brusque little doctor was off.

Chadbourne found his way out of the Institute, breathing happily on reaching the street. He looked back up at the tall building, feeling sorry for those inside who could never simply walk out as he had.

IT WAS that night that he had the first of the dreams. The rest of the day was uneventful. He had gone to his job and come home without anything unusual hap-

pening. He had listened to the radio till eleven or so and then gone to sleep.

Perhaps it was quite understandable, but the dream was vivid enough to be most painful, the way dreams are when they are so very real. He was in that room again. The little gray barren room with the one window that wouldn't even open properly, and Kessler was talking to him, talking on and on.

Although what he said was not part of the dream, Chadbourne could see so clearly the lips of the man working as he spoke. The small black eyes fixed unwaveringly on his own, and beyond them the padded walls on four sides and the door that wouldn't open. In his dream Chadbourne had that most usual sensation that he could not get up off the cot, that he could not answer Kessler back but lay there, a prisoner to some strange paralysis of mind and body while the psychiatrist talked on and on.

He woke up. It was still dark. His pillow and sheets were wet with sweat, and then his heart and mind quieted as he parsed reality from unreality.

He lay for a while on his back looking up at the ceiling and listening to the reassuring night sounds of the city coming in through his half open window, and his mind flew through the darkness up to that granite monument on the cliff tops north of the city.

That monument to Man's twistedness and abnormality and degradation of soul and mind. He felt an almost personal sense of pity and then an indignation that he should have been so affected by his trip up there with Kessler. Damn the guy, anyway! What was he trying to do?

The next day and the next went smoothly, and Chadbourne did not see Kessler. Once he asked Mrs. Bessey, and she said,

"Oh, I can't keep track of the comings and goings of people in this house. I don't know. Maybe he sleeps up at the hospital sometimes."

It was the fourth night that Chadbourne had the same dream again. The same, only more trying on him. More vivid. Longer. A greater ordeal, and when he woke up in the small hours of the morning shaking with the terror of the thing, the shame that a

grown man of his age should react thusly was the smallest part of his troubles.

For he now had two things to fear and to dread. His strange occasional experiences of "loneliness" and this terribly vivid dream that was as real as any part of his life had ever been or could ever hope to be, it seemed. And deep down inside as he lay on his back the rest of the night not sleeping but tossing and turning feverishly, he kept divining intuitively that there was some connection between the one experience and the other. The strange delusion and the dream.

Not knowing quite why, for he still felt a certain gratefulness to the man for caring for him, Edgar began to avoid Kessler as much as possible. And he carried around with himself day and night a fear of the two things that happened to him.

He developed the habit of leaving the Becker Tower at night, with a companion, for that seemed to give him a tighter hold on reality. And at night he would listen to his radio late until he got so tired and sleepy he could hardly sit up, and then there seemed less danger, or so he thought, of the vivid nightmares about the terrible grim room with the padded walls and door that did not open.

But every now and then the dream would slip through his defenses. Instead of frightening him less, its affects were even more devastating, and he began, in the nightmare, to be able to detect some of Kessler's words as the physician droned on seated by the cot.

It was strange talk, and some of it still remained in Chadbourne's mind when he awoke, sweat-soaked and threshing. The words and phrases were peculiar even if he could remember their sequence. They made little sense, reminding him only of that passage in "Occult Factors in Psychology."

CHADBOURNE grew paler and lost weight. Mrs. Joplin remarked on it and so did Mrs. Bessey. Finally, at the suggestion of some of his co-workers, he sought out the doctor who examined for the company. That worthy was a jolly-faced, middle-aged individual who thumped Chadbourne's chest, took his blood pressure, listened to his heart, listened to the story of

the head injury (although for some reason that he was annoyed with afterward, Edgar did not mention his delusion of loneliness nor his nightmares), and pronounced him quite fit.

The doctor suggested that Edgar get a bit more exercise and sleep and put on some weight.

It was a week later when Chadbourne had been somewhat free for a few nights of his unpleasant dreams and was trying manfully to relegate these experiences of the last couple of months into the background, when it happened again.

He had avoided working late recently, but this night it could not be got around, and when he stepped out into the empty hall of the Tower Building well past seven p.m., he had the uncomfortable feeling that the cycle was about to start again.

The elevator door finally opened and Chadbourne stepped in. It was a shock but not a surprise to notice that he was alone in the car. There was, this time, not even an operator. When the car reached the ground floor, Chadbourne was shaking. He looked neither to left nor right, knowing there would be no starter nor anyone else in the foyer, but fairly skittered into the street.

The last few weeks with their sleeplessness and worry had taken a toll. Chadbourne rushed along the desolate pavements this night without an attempt to control his pace or his feelings. It was all too much. The lighted empty stores, the hot-dog-and-orange-juice stand on the corner with half-finished glasses of liquid on the counter as though left there just a fraction ago by someone who was now no more. The subway kiosks, usually so crowded, now deserted.

Finally Chadbourne made home and ran up the stairs, his steps ringing through the lonely house. This time though there was no desire in him to fight, to temporize, or to reason out the thing.

He paused on the second-floor landing, shoved a nickel into the phone there and dialed the operator. It had worked before. His first finger trembled as he placed it in the last slot and twirled the metal shield. It rang once . . . twice . . . three times—sometimes they're busy, they take time to answer—five, six, seven rings He felt a

mustache of sweat. He pulled at his ear lobe agitatedly.

It was more than a dozen rings before he hung up, waited for his nickel to shoot back, and as fast as he retrieved it, placed it in the slot again, and again dialed operator. This time there was no mistake, for he leaned there, he didn't know quite how long, and the signal droned on at its mathematical intervals. But no one answered!

He hung up a second time, and a third time tried the phone. This time completely panic-stricken, he dialed the number of the local police precinct scribbled on the pad by the phone with the Fire Department number and the plumber. He heard the click of contact points and then the bell was ringing. But there was no reply!

Chadbourne jammed up the phone and leaped on up to his room. He found it hard to sit down. There was a building tension in him that clutched at his throat and made it hard to breathe.

Finally he tore from his room, went across the way to Kessler's. He rapped but there was no answer. He tried the doorknob cautiously, and to his surprise it was open! He pushed into the room, snapping the wall switch. There was no one there! What was more, the room was empty of Kessler's books and clothes and various medical paraphernalia. It was tidied and neat as though waiting for a new boarder.

Chadbourne went through the house then. Mrs. Joplin, the saxophone player, the seamstress on the ground floor and down into the basement where Mrs. Bessey held forth. But there was no one! Not even the ubiquitous gray cat that curled in the proprietress' easy chair if it was not prowling around the sub-cellars below.

Chadbourne came back up the stairs calling as he came, his voice a sad crying sound. He reached his room again and double-locked the door. He lay on his bed and sobbed. He wished now he'd kept some of the sedatives Kessler had given him some time ago, but he'd thrown them out thinking possibly they were not good to take for any length of time.

HE LAY there on his bed, alone in the house and in the city and in the world, for all he knew. And as he lay, the com-

monplace scene of his little room seemed to blend in with a remembered one, and although he was sure he was not asleep and dreaming, Chadbourne began to see against his own prosaic walls, the padded sides of that other place with the small prisoner's window in the corner looking down from the heights to the base of the cliffs, the railroad tracks and the river that ran beyond them.

And suddenly, although in this mind-picture there was no transition from waking to sleeping, it seemed that Kessler sat at his side and talked to him in a low droning voice that went on and on like the tide at seashore. And Kessler was saying these words Chadbourne could now make out and make sense of:

*"This is the realness. You are the realness. There is nothing else but what you have dreamed to be. You are God. You are immortality. You are Eternity. There is nothing else before you or beyond you. These others are what you have thought up to amuse yourself, and now they amuse you not!"*

Kessler's voice grew louder and his sharp features seemed to come closer. Chadbourne came off his bed with a scream. He felt for the door and for a moment there was the ghastly smoothness of padding! He could swear that! Swear it!

But then he found a knob and wrenched it open and he was on the stairs thundering down one flight, two flights—and suddenly he was confronted by Mrs. Bessey.

"Was that you making those terrible noises, Mister Chadbourne?" she reproached.

He sank down on the stairs at her feet.

"Now you aren't feeling right, are you?"

"Where's Dr. Kessler?" he managed to get out.

"Oh, the doctor? Why, he moved several days ago. I thought you probably knew. I don't really know where he's gone. I guess to stay up at the hospital or around there."

Chadbourne got to his feet and started upward again. He noticed with a part of his mind that thankfully still functioned in commonplace channels that the saxophonist was improving. There was more melody than discord now, and Mrs. Joplin's youngest was screaming for a nickel.

The next day was uphill agony. The usual

easy things—his tasks at the office, getting to and from—they were all effortful, for Chadbourne was weighted down with the fear that had grown from a small seed deep inside him into a blossoming all-consuming monster.

It now seemed more than likely to him that he was losing his mind, either as a result of that fall or other factors unknown. But he resisted the part of his conscience that said, "Go somewhere! Get an opinion. Get the company doctor to find a psychiatrist." For when he thought of that step and of a psychiatrist, he thought of Kessler, and Kessler made him think of that bleak, granite institution on the cliff tops at the north of the city. And he thought that whatever happened, whatever became of him, he would not . . . could not go to a place like that to become one of those lost souls locked away from their fellow men in small padded vacuums of their own exquisite agony.

It was only a week or so more, he reasoned by his desk calendar, before the Friday noon would come when he was going back home for the Easter weekend.

THOSE days were among the hardest Chadbourne ever spent. He postponed going back to the rooming house nights so much that Mrs. Bessey referred to him as a newfangled gadabout. He had a scare one evening when after work he ate downtown and then went to a late movie. He was watching the film when suddenly he looked around, and it seemed, found himself alone in the auditorium!

He got up quickly, his heart already pounding and his mouth dry in anticipation of the ordeal he expected. But then there was a colored porter in the lobby cleaning up chewing-gum papers and cigarette butts. And through the foyer glass doors, Chadbourne could see an occasional person passing outside on the late-night streets.

Edgar's relief must have shown on his face, for as he passed by, the porter said, "Good picture, suh, huh?"

"Yes. Yes!"

Edgar hurried home feeling elated at his reprieve. But the dreams kept up. Always the same repetitious horrible dream. The padded room, and he looking at it, giving it

a slightly distorted dimension from his vantage stretched out on the simple cot, so that even the window set high and at the corner seemed far away and unattainable.

And once it was almost as though he were finding that even if attempted, the window was a fake, a fraud, opening not enough to let freedom either in or out.

Like life, Kessler in the dream hissed at him: "A mirage! A figment of *your* imagination, young man!"

The psychiatrist droned on, and often his words reminded Chadbourne of other words he'd read in some of those translated tomes of the doctor's.

He kept going those last days to the pre-Easter Friday by will-power and doggedness, although he felt now and every morning as he shaved his gray face in front of the mirror that the cause . . . his cause . . . was a bleak one. He had the desire of the very frightened, though, to go home, as if by so doing, these things in him would relent, would be scared off like demons, by the love of those who were fond of him.

The momentous Friday finally came. In the general pre-holiday office hilarity, they jolly-good-fellowed Edgar, cautioned him to get rested up. "You look a little peaked, Son," they admonished.

One of the bosses was going South, but Edgar's trip was the longest among the subordinates. Somebody gave him a box of chocolates, which he, not liking them, turned over to Mrs. Joplin when he got back to the rooming house to pack that early afternoon, it being but a half day at the Becker Tower.

He told Mrs. Bessey that of course he'd be back, but secretly thought to himself that he wouldn't. He was paid up through the following Monday and she would stand to lose nothing by it.

He packed, but the business did not prevent his mind from thinking of the problems that were uppermost therein. He wondered again about Dr. Kessler. Was it natural that the man had never returned here since he'd left, wherever he'd gone to . . . or perhaps it was perfectly natural. He'd never charged Chadbourne a thing. That was kindness of a sort, especially from one of those foreign doctors who are known for

their characteristic heavy charging and dubious ethics.

He finally had his two suitcases packed and left the rooming house. He allowed himself the luxury of a taxi to the terminal and then because he'd left time for the bus, had something of a wait aboard the train before it pulled out.

Chadbourne felt happier than he had in some time. The bustle of so many people, the excitement of the beginning of his trip home served to raise his spirits somewhat.

THEY came out of the underground after a while, and the express started along the ribbons of steel that paralleled the river. Finally he knew where they were. With some distaste and reluctance Chadbourne pressed his head against the window. Yes, there were the cliffs rising ahead and on top of them the great granite bulk of the Institute.

He suppressed an inner shudder and turned his attention to a magazine as they passed by the place. The magazine took him to dinner time. Then he went in and sat at a table with a drummer from the West Coast and two girls going home on finishing-school vacation. The conversation was light and pleasant and Chadbourne ate the best meal he'd eaten all week.

The porter had his upper made when he got back to the Pullman. There was a nice old man heading for a convention of shoe manufacturers in the lower. They chatted for a while and then the old man said, "Well, guess I'll turn in. Porter wakes me at five-thirty. That's when I've got to get off! You're lucky!"

Edgar climbed into his berth, undressed, and by the little corner light read his magazine for a while and then lulled by the restful motion of the sleeping car, the far-off and reassuring whistle of the locomotive somewhere up in the darkness and the rhythmical rattle of wheel clicks on the rails, Chadbourne fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

It was the shock and vibration that woke him. The train jounced, moved slowly a bit further, and then jounced again to a stop. The radium hand on his wristwatch said quarter to five. Probably they were changing engines somewhere. He lay there like

that for a time listening to the noises of the railroad. Finally, there was another jerk, smoother this time, the sound of slack being taken up in the couplings, and then the engine and its string began to move.

The tempo of puffing accelerated and they were off again. It was hard to get back to sleep and he lay for some time thinking. He was pleased with the restfulness of his mind and wondered if the trip and change of scenery had worked this wonder. The city, his job, Kessler and the Institute seemed far away. His frightening experiences there seemed even further.

As the hands of his watch crept around towards five-thirty, Chadbourne pitied the elderly man in the lower berth beneath him having to be roused out of bed at this hour and sent out into the cold darkness of predawn.

Chadbourne's luminous wristwatch hand stood at five-thirty when he felt the train begin to slow down. He realized then that the porter had slipped up on calling the man beneath him. Playing the good samaritan, he stuck his head through the curtains and looked downward. There was no sound and no noise. Chadbourne quickly reached for his bathrobe and slippers and went down the steps.

"Hey," he whispered at the old man's lower-berth curtain.

There was no reply. The train was slowing even more. This certainly must be the stop. He waved the curtains gently. Then on impulse he stuck his fingers through and unhooked a button. He looked in. The berth was empty! Funny. He'd been lying awake since quarter to five. Funny that the old man had gotten out and dressed more than forty-five minutes before his stop without Edgar hearing him.

He went through the car and stood in the vestibule at the end. He found a cigarette in his dressing-gown pocket, lit it. The long string of cars slid into a small country oasis of light. It was a tiny station and the train stopped almost resentfully, huffing and puffing up front and ringing its bell, so impatient to be off.

The platform was completely empty, although Chadbourne looked as far as he could from the vestibule door window up and down to see if the elderly man had got-

ten off all right. There was no one in sight . . . anywhere!

The train shook itself and its cars, huffed and puffed again, and started off into the night. There's something about a country railroad station at night, Edgar thought. There's a romance about it, a loneliness . . . a loneliness!

THAT gave him the feeling and he left the vestibule. He came to his own berth and again looked into the old man's. Empty. He walked back down the train then and told himself how silly this was. What if he didn't see a porter anywhere! And then because the fear of having some startled woman scream at him was less than this other fear, he opened a curtain here and there and looked in. And always the berths were empty! Rumpled and open, if you please, but empty of any human!

He walked the length of the sleepers and then forward to the dining car. There was no one. He was alone on the train! Forward of the diner was a baggage car, locked as usual from the rest of the train. He thundered on the door. Certainly even the sleepiest conductor would hear that! But there was no reply and no sound from within.

The first streaks of a chill dawn were across the dark sky as he tore back through the train, here and there stopping at random looking in a berth like a child who's lost his parent. But he knew now what had happened. He was quite alone.

The train chugged on through flat, rolling countryside. It grew lighter and a brilliant sun came up. But nowhere was there any life on the express. Chadbourne spent the slowly passing hours with a thousand different thoughts and a hundred different meaningless little errands around the train. He found the porter's shoe-shining equipment in one of the rest rooms laid out neatly along with a half-dozen pairs of shoes . . . but no porter, and no one else! Anywhere!

He changed from his pajamas into regular clothes feverishly and packed his belongings, as though those things really mattered. It was seven-thirty and then eight, and then it moved on towards nine. At nine they came to his stop. He went through the train again to be sure. By this time, the berths should have been made up. The sleeping cars should

be Pullman seats again. But his was the only activity on the train. He tried to reason the thing out. He tried desperately, as though his life depended on it . . . as perhaps it did. But here he was. He knew his name. Where he was going and from whence he had come. He could feel the hard metal of the train side. He knew that at such-and-such an hour in a few moments he would arrive at his own stop and that the train would halt there. About this other strangeness, this delusion, he could not guess.

He was waiting at the vestibule door as the train tolled the long bell that sent it thundering across Scofields' Plain, at the end of which stood the little station. They were slowing down. They were stopping, and Edgar Chadbourne got off at the tiny platform. He had barely set foot on the ground and put his two suitcases down when the train shook to life again and slid out of the station, the engine drawing its string of empty cars into the distance, throwing up a white plume of smoke into the morning chilliness.

He watched the train down the long straightaway that ran from the station. He could see it for miles with its mushroom of white above it against the blue sky. And then it was gone and he turned to face what he feared to face—the empty station. No transportation for him though they'd known he was arriving and when.

HE BEGAN the walk down from the station, weighted down with his two suitcases, hindered by his city shoes. It was a long way to home, but that was where he wanted to get more than anywhere else.

He passed the Presbyterian Church and the general store where Old Man Allen used to hold forth. He didn't even bother to look inside. He knew there was no one. There was the tiny volunteer Fire Department with the chairs tilted against the house outside, never before empty in his memory. On the outskirts of town he could see a silo bulging with hay, its red roof and silver cock weather vane against the sky.

He turned across the fields because it was shorter that way, and the hard, still-frozen earth made walking difficult. Or perhaps he'd come this way because of the school. It was the same school he'd been to, and his

mother had written him after she'd said, "We're so happy you're coming, Edgar, for a visit," that Kathy would be rehearsing her music pupils at the school Saturday morning. And his mother had suggested that when Mr. Appleby (she'd told him to meet the city train) picked him up at the station, why didn't they come home by way of the school so he could see Kathy and her pupils?

There it was. Why, it had been repainted since he saw it last! But the broad ugly, lovely outlines were unchanged. The cupola on top and the bell that you could hear and curse across the fields down to the fishing stream on those first school days in September when there were a million other things you'd rather do than the three R's.

Everything about the schoolhouse was the same. The neatly rolled yard out front where they'd played. The flagpole he'd shinied up once and had to write on the blackboard a hundred times, "I'm a foolish boy who wants to break his neck." But there was nobody. Nobody! No pupils. No Kathy. The piano—he went over and looked through the side window—was sitting, half its keys in a shaft of morning sunlight. Otherwise alone.

Edgar began to run in the direction that was his home. Somewhere along the way he dropped his suitcases. He fell several times, and the neatly pressed trousers became ragged and dirty. Through his mind raced other images. The nightmares and the three experiences like this back in the city. The nightmares were Kessler and Kessler talking, and the things that he said in the dream now made a kind of sense . . . that life was a fraud and a masquerade.

Somehow, he found the red-shingled house and took its emptiness with an exhausted stoicism. He trudged on to the Corners. Kathy's home was the same. All of her things . . . all of her personified, but no Kathy. And her aged father who'd been bedridden for years—he was also gone into a strange vacuum into which all of life had been sucked!

This time Chadbourne knew there'd be no changing back.

"When you stop imagining . . ." he could hear Kessler droning as though the man were standing with him although, of course, he wasn't. "When you stop imagining and

stop believing, these imaginings and people built up through eons of time are no more! You, yourself, may be an 'imagining,' a 'believed-in' of someone else. And then so surely as the sun and tides . . . you will be no more! We call it death!"

**E**DGAR went through the surrounding countryside and land, then, not knowing where he was going but marching grimly as though he had to get there. He took in the scenery as he never had before. The stark brown trees standing sentinel in the fields. The dried cornstalks silhouetted against the western sky. The rude fences and lines of boulders dividing this man's land from that.

Suddenly it became unendurable, an emotion that superseded the horror and terror. Chadbourne ran as he'd never run before, and the way he was running, he came quickly to the ravine. He stood poised at the crest and looked down. It was not such a drop, but that sound in the distance coming this way made it the depth and breadth of life itself!

He jumped and landed sprawling on the tracks and ballast, not minding the sharp pain in his ankle and arm. It seemed so perfectly right that he was here—the only solution, and he was glad for the sound that was coming closer, the slow-growing earthquake under him.

Even the noise now was droning out Kessler's words, and Chadbourne lay there with delicious expectation. At the near-crescendo of noise, some primeval instinct took hold of him in his brain and arteries and muscles at the last fractional second. With the roaring of the whistle and the hissing of steam all around him, he lurched sideways like a great wounded frog, and sprawled by the right-of-way.

**H**E KNEW nothing again until his wakening feet felt the cool of sheets and another coolness that was a hand on his head. And without opening his eyes, he knew he was home, and opening them, Edgar saw his mother and Kathy.

"You're all right," they said, and the love in their faces reaching out towards him was a more real feeling than the heavy cast on his left arm.

They petted him and pampered him, and

Edgar's young brother peered in the door and waved. The doctor had just gone, they told him. He was going to be all right. He had a broken arm and a sprained ankle and he'd been unconscious for some hours with the blow on the head.

"Oh, Edgar!" his mother broke down, "you've been working too hard! Imagine getting *lost* coming back to your own home!"

Edgar smiled and filled his eyes with Kathy. She was just as lovely . . . but there was something else. A maturity that hadn't been there before. He knew now they were ready for one another and realized that she knew it, too.

He lay there peacefully in bed looking out the window at the sunny fields, at the dog running with his brother, and he wondered why he was so happy and why he was completely free of fear.

He wrote Mrs. Bessey and his employer letters on his doctor's advice, explaining that he would be staying out here for some time.

And in the post a week later, he had delivered to him two letters in return. Edgar was up and around now, his ankle heavily bandaged and arm-in-cast not bothering him, feeling his strength coming back both of mind and body.

He'd been doing some simple chores for his mother and he went out on the porch with the two letters his brother had brought from town. He was to see Kathy that night, and there was nothing in the world to worry about.

HE LAID aside the letter in Mrs. Bessey's obvious handwriting unopened, and looked at the other. He slit it and took out the sheet of paper, frowning down at it. The salutation was simply, "My young friend. . ." and from that he knew it was Kessler and he thought of the man for the first time in this glorious week, but now without bother or misgiving.

He read the words of the cramped handwriting, read the letter twice. There was a reminiscent ring to these phrases and much of it was virtually un-understandable. Kessler, Chadbourne suddenly realized, must be a demented person. The only thing he agreed with as sound advice was the psychi-

atrist's last sentence: "I would suggest that you burn this letter."

Edgar read it a third time, trying to get the sense out of it before consigning it to the kitchen stove.

"I chose you as a likely subject, Chadbourne, because of the fortuitous event of your accident. I found you were suggestable. You will remember that I am not young but old, and oldness, my young man, is a disease of the Great Mind. When those about us who have believed us into being, grow tired with the pattern that is us, we die, and that is death.

"To perpetuate the only individualistic thing in life, which is one's ego, one must find another caravan for one's soul, for it can be transferred, my young friend, and you and I were to make that transference!

"The fact that you have received this letter, though, is my acknowledgement of defeat. You see, Chadbourne, and this is an ironic truth, you are the focus, apparently, of more belief and affection than I, the great Dr. Kessler. You, in your ignorance, have proved too strong, and I, in my knowledge, have been too weak!"

Chadbourne impatiently put the letter aside and opened up Mrs. Bessey's note. It was ebullient and sorrowful. They would miss him. She'd looked upon him almost as a son, but of course, his own mother would want him for a while. She hoped he was feeling better, and oh, yes, he probably hadn't heard the news. She enclosed the clipping.

Chadbourne held the paper oblong clipped rudely from a city daily. It was datelined just a week ago and described the demise of one, "Josef F. Kessler, M.D., who leapt or fell to his death from a window of the doctors' dining room in the Institute Mental Hospital to which he was attached. His body landed on the South Shore Railroad tracks below and was mangled beyond recognition by a passing train."

Chadbourne laid the clipping and Mrs. Bessey's letter aside. He recalled the Institute as part of an old, almost-forgotten memory. And the physician's private dining room on the uppermost floor. The only room in the hospital where the windows opened!