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# STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY AND TERROR

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"Standing in the corner was a man's figure."



## Dread Exile

By Paul Ernst

**T**HE fact that I hadn't heard the man come into the room is not to be wondered at. Living on the third floor of a hotel in one of the noisiest spots in the city, I can scarcely hear my own footsteps sometimes. Besides, I was tired out from a strenuous day; and I may have dozed for a few moments over my book.

Nevertheless, it was with a start that I suddenly looked up to find I had a visitor. And such a visitor!

Before me, standing in the gloom just outside the circle of light cast by my reading lamp, was one of the tallest men I had ever seen. And one of the thinnest. Like a human tent-pole he stood there, with a

voluminous topcoat billowing loosely over his thin frame in a tent-like way that completed the simile. The fact that he should wear a coat was in itself remarkable, for it was a roasting hot summer night. Why a man should bundle himself up as this one did, was certainly beyond my comprehension.

Who was the grotesque stranger—  
a maniac or the teller of an incredible truth?

The collar of the coat was drawn up, and the brim of his black felt hat was pulled

down so that all I could see of his face were his eyes, gleaming like live coals. The coat swelled hugely over his chest, as though a bundle was concealed under his coat; and this protrusion gave him the appearance of a grotesque, stoop-shouldered pouter-pigeon.

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "How did you get in here?" A silly question. Obviously he had walked in. On hot nights I often leave my door on the latch, and he could have done so easily. But I was taken so unawares, so oddly disturbed by something about the look of him, that I could speak only nonsense.

He said nothing, but just stared at me with his gleaming eyes.

"I didn't hear you come in," I went on.

**S**TILL he made no reply, merely gazing at me out of those piercing eyes and standing before me in the gloom, this stoop-shouldered pouter-pigeon of a man. I wondered what was in the big bundle concealed over his chest.

"What do you want?" I demanded then, annoyed at his crazy silence, and disquieted by his eyes. In my work as a reporter I have had to do several times with people mentally unbalanced; and I didn't half like the glints in those unblinking eyes. "What do you want?" I repeated.

Now at last, he spoke.

"I want to tell you a story," he said.

His voice was most peculiar. He treated the English in a way unfamiliar to me. Not as a foreigner would, with a broad accent; but as a man might who had seldom spoken at all, in any language. His voice was thick and creaky, and his tongue formed syllables as though it had been made of wood. A dumb man, who had but recently learned to talk, might have spoken as this man did.

At his peculiar answer, my annoyance and disquiet increased. At two o'clock in the morning a man you've never seen before in your life comes into your room, and, at your repeated demands as to what he wants, says he wants to tell you a story!

The fellow moved closer and I noticed that he was unsteady on his long legs. I saw that he was frightfully emaciated from some illness; it couldn't have been from starvation, for the excellence of his top-coat indicated a well-lined purse. And then I saw his hands.

Long, thin, with talon-like fingers, they were more closely covered with hair than any human hands I'd ever seen before. And the hair was peculiar. It was fine, close-set, more like *fur* than hair.

He saw me gazing at them, and abruptly thrust them into the pockets of his coat.

"This is to be a long story," he said, in that curious, muffled voice of his. "May I sit down?" He moved uncertainly toward a chair.

"Certainly, sit down," I replied. I started up to help him, but he waved me away as though fearful of my touch.

**H**E seated himself, sighed deeply, and began:

"I want to tell you this story because you are a writer and may be able to get it before the public eye. Publicity! It is the only way I can think of to have justice done. I cannot go to the police. They would laugh at me. Publicity is the only answer—and even that may be useless. . . ."

He sighed again, the manner of which struck me as very odd. I mean, he sighed for so long a time. For seconds on end the air was exhaled steadily from his lungs, and still it issued forth. It is hard to convey the queerness of it. Draw into your own lungs as much air as you can. Exhale it as slowly as you can, till it is all gone. Multiply by three the number of seconds your exhalation endured, and you will have about the length of time this man's sigh lasted.

A trivial thing to mention, yet I can't describe how the oddity of it

struck me. It indicated, you see, that the big bundle that swelled out his coat over his chest, was not a bundle at all—but the chest itself! And who ever saw, particularly on a thin and narrow shouldered man, a chest measuring some seventy inches around?

"Uncover your typewriter, please, and take down my story," was my bizarre visitor's demand. "I'll speak slowly so you can get it all."

Now this seemed unbearably high-handed. My expression must have showed that I was about to protest. The man's eyes gleamed more brightly. His hands, thrust in his coat pockets, moved a little as though they had been convulsively clenched.

"Take down my story!" he said, his voice very harsh now. "Quickly! I have little time left me here!"

By now I was thoroughly convinced, naturally, that I was dealing with a lunatic. It became a question of humoring him till I could make up an excuse for telephoning, and call for help. I moved to the card table on which my typewriter was resting, and sat down before it.

He began to dictate, abruptly, without preliminaries, as a man might wander into a public stenographer's office, dictate a letter, only to wander casually out again with no explanations of any kind.

"MY name," he began, "is well known to you. But I will not reveal it till later. You wouldn't believe me if I told you now."

"My story has to do with a theft as incredible as it is horrible, by a thief that no detectives could ever run down; that no power save aroused public opinion can ever bring to justice."

"It began two days ago, when I was a young man with a healthy, athletic body, a fortune with which to indulge it, and not a care on earth."

I started, here, and gazed in amazement at my mad visitor. Young? He looked to be at least sixty! Athletic body? He was as emaciated as death, with his skinny shoulders stooped as though with the weight of whatever it was that bulged out the breast of his coat so far! I calculated the distance to the telephone stand, decided I couldn't reach it without a fight that might be disastrous to his feeble old frame, and resumed my typing. My visitor went on:

"Two days ago, almost to the hour, I got my first indication of the change that was to come swiftly and fatally into my life. Two short days ago! In those forty-eight hours I passed from life to death, from sane health to mad dissolution. . . . But I'll try to keep from wandering, George, and give you this as it all happened."

Again I started with amazement. This queer stranger knew my name and used it intimately, yet I *knew* I'd never seen him before. But I did not interrupt his narrative.

"I WAS sitting alone in the bedroom of my apartment in town when it happened—this first step in the change that was to be mine. I had dismissed my man for the night, and was smoking a last cigarette before getting into bed and snapping off the lights. At my feet lay my dog, Flix, his eyes half shut and his tail thumping the floor occasionally when I let my hand slide down over the arm of my chair to touch his head."

"The first thing I noticed was that it had suddenly become very quiet. Amazingly quiet for the city. It was as though a shell of silence had been drawn around that room, shutting out the sounds of late traffic, making the quiet so intense that it almost hurt."

"Wondering a little at it, I put out my cigarette, and started to

rise from my chair. But I sank back into it again as my eyes happened to rest on Flix, at my feet.

"The dog, of a sudden, was acting very queerly. His head had jerked up as though on a string. His eyes, wide and alert, were staring into a dark corner of the room, as though they saw something I could not see.

"Even as I watched, a phosphorescent greenish glare came into those eyes. His lips twitched back from his fangs and a low growl sounded deep in his throat. Slowly he got up and stood, trembling slightly, while his eyes continued to probe the darkened corner.

"Perplexedly, I, too, stared at the corner. There was absolutely nothing to be seen. It was only dimly lit by the reading light above my head; but it was illuminated enough to show there was nothing there. Nothing!

"What's up, Flix?" I murmured, patting the dog's head. To my astonishment he moved away from my hand as though not recognizing its touch, and growled louder as he shrank back from the empty corner. There were minute whitish flecks on his jaws now.

"**S**TILL I had no warning premonition of the tremendous thing that was about to happen. It had been a hot day; Flix's coat is furry; the heat might have affected him. Vowing to clip him next morning, I got up and opened the bedroom door and ordered him out of the room. The corridor was cooler, anyway; and out there he wouldn't disturb my sleep by snarling feverishly at imaginary burglars all night.

"He slunk out, and I got into bed. For one more moment I gazed at the corner that had held Flix's attention. In that moment a distinct feeling of uneasiness, of ill-being, came over me. But I ignored it, and turned out the lights.

"However, sleep would not come. Wakefully I tossed, and watched the sinking moon send its slanting rays more and more levelly in through my window. The feeling of disquiet grew within me till, for no reason whatever that I could think of, I was in the grip of actual horror.

"I was, I admit, in the unreasonable frame of mind where a man can see and hear anything. Had I never again seen and heard what happened a moment later, I'd have gone to my death thinking it was only the product of imagination.

"My eyes had continually strayed to that corner, now sunk in blackness unpenetrated by the moonlight. And now it seemed they rested on other eyes. A pair of eyes that peered from the gloom about six feet from the floor, where the eyes of a tall man might be—if, of course, there had been a man there.

"Increasingly apparent, the eyes became. Now I could see them clearly enough to read their expression—or it seemed I could. And the expression was one blended of desperation and invincible purpose. Furthermore, the eyes were red!

"Red eyes! I don't mean they were blood-shot. The whites were clear rings around the pupils. The pupils themselves were red. Red as fire; red as crimson glass beads.

"**I** STARED into those red eyes as though hypnotized, unable to make a move or a sound. Spell-bound. I've often heard that word used. I know now what it means!

"And then I began to make out a shadowy background for the eyes: a human seeming head; a tall, dim body. All seemed to materialize out of empty air as though conjured up by my fancy.

"I lay there, breathless, staring at the shadowy head in which were set those burning, fire-red eyes, glinting with desperate purpose.

From the street, seeming to penetrate with difficulty the shell of silence drawn around the room, came the single toot of a motor horn. Its prosaic sound seemed but to intensify the reality of the impossible vision growing ever clearer before my gaze.

"Now I fought with the helplessness that bound my muscles. I struggled to get out of bed, to spring to the corner and come to grips with this inhuman thing—or prove to myself that there was nothing there after all.

"I couldn't move a finger. And as I lay there, with my heart thumping in my breast and cold sweat standing out on my forehead, I distinctly heard a low, soft sigh. A voice came to my ears:

"Go to sleep. I will you go to sleep."

"At that a film seemed to gather before me. The red, red eyes faded into far distances. The flooding moonlight went dark. Swiftly, against all the protest of my quivering senses, I *did* go to sleep! It was as though I'd been chloroformed.

"I couldn't have been sunk long in that unearthly sleep. Five minutes, perhaps. For when my eyes jerked open again the moon's rays had slanted very little lower.

"I WAS waked by the sound of my own voice. And for an instant, in a helpless sort of doze, I floated in a half-slumber where I could hear strange words coming from my own lips as though I were another person standing off at a distance and listening to myself.

"And strange indeed were the words! Incredible! Incomprehensible!

"... exiled ... doomed forever ... never to leave this ghastly place and go back home ... racked and wasted by disease ... but another body. . . ."

"And this raving, this mumbling of thoughts that could not possibly have originated in my brain, was yet coming from my lips! As though I had suddenly become a mere mouthpiece for another's mind!

"I stirred slightly, and tried harder for full wakefulness. Slowly it came, as the chains of my nightmare were broken. And with wakefulness came an increase of the unreasoning horror that had gripped me since I had turned out the lights.

"With an exclamation that should have been a shout, but which was hardly more than a whisper, I sat up.

"Standing in the corner, disclosed by the moonlight, was a man's figure. Complete in every detail I saw it—from sunken cheeks and fire-red eyes, to emaciated legs and unbelievably swollen chest.

"For an instant we stared at each other. Then, with an enormous effort of will, I tensed my muscles for a spring. A little of the hypnotic tension that had held me was released, somehow, by the realization that this figure was after all of solid flesh and blood.

"The man must have read my purpose in my eyes, for he started to move aside. But before he could, I had launched myself at him.

"My hands tore at his throat. . . .

"FOR a fleeting second my fingers pressed against solid substance. Then the column of the throat drained away like water running out of a tap. Another second and my fingers had met and were pressing only against each other. Under me the form I'd sprung upon, and had thought was flesh and blood and bone, was gone. I collapsed against the chair, utterly alone in the room.

"Shuddering, with my eyes starting from my head, I stared around

me. There was nothing to be seen. Nothing! Yet I had clearly seen that figure in the chair—had *felt* it for a moment.

"I thought I heard a footstep outside the door, and the next instant I heard Flix howl in the hall, as if the dog had seen something pass out through the wood panels of the door. Then there was silence.

"The silence was now a normal one, broken frequently by the night noises of the city. The queer shell of quiet that had seemed to surround the place was lifted. Reassured a little by the familiar discords that told of people living and moving all around me, I got back into bed.

"But I didn't go to sleep. I couldn't! Instinct told me surely that I had narrowly escaped something awful and final. What could it be? What kind of thing was it that had sat in that chair, staring at my sleeping form with its flamed eyes? What kind of creature could appear and disappear at will, and pass through solid wood doors? Something weird and supernatural, something inexplicable to the mind of man, had kept vigil over me in my room! That was all I knew.

"Wide-eyed and wakeful, I waited for day to come and for the honest sunlight to relieve me of the freezing fear that still clutched me.

"IN the morning I did feel better.

I had managed to compose myself a little during the slow hours of dawn. I was beginning to be convinced somewhat when I told myself the fears of the night had been entirely ungrounded and due to nightmare-induced superstition. I had imagined a spectral figure, and had been childishly horrified by it, that was all. Tall men with red eyes don't *really* appear and then disappear, under one's very fingers, into thin air. Flix had growled at nothing, and on that

fimsy foundation I had built the things I'd thought to see and hear during the night.

"After my morning shower I stepped to the mirror and inspected myself critically. It was reassuring to look at my square-jawed, tanned face and the muscular, tanned body under it. They were so palpably the face and body of a man who ought to have a well balanced mind; who should certainly know better than to let himself 'see things' during the night.

"I dressed and went to the breakfast table, feeling more and more foolish about the nocturnal absurdity I'd indulged in. And there, just as I was succeeding in dismissing all thought of the vision of the night, something occurred that started again the cold sweat that had drenched me during the black hours.

"My servant, the man-of-all-work who went with me everywhere, held out a hat. It was a black felt hat with a down-drooping brim, like no hat I'd ever worn.

"'Whoever visited you last night after I was gone, sir,' he said, 'went off without his hat. Shall I call and return it, or shall I just—'

"HE stopped there and stared, with open mouth, at my face. I have no doubt my face was arresting enough. I could feel it go chalk white as I gazed at that hat. And I braced myself with my hands on the table as the room began to revolve crazily around me.

"'Just keep it, Saunders,' I managed to say at last. 'Maybe the—person—who left it will come back for it.'

"But after a while I got over even that shock. Indeed, after I'd thought it over, the incident looked hopeful rather than alarming.

"There actually had been a man in my room. The hat proved it. That released me from the charge

of childish superstition, and also from the suspicion that perhaps my mind wasn't as well balanced as I'd always assumed it was. There *had* been a man there.

"How had he melted away under my throttling fingers? How had he hidden in the corner where I'd first seen those implacable red eyes? There was no place in that corner to hide. Why hadn't I seen him at once, as Flix apparently had? And how had I come to fall asleep in spite of all my effort not to—and half waked to hear myself mumbling those strange things?

"These questions, at first apparently unanswerable, I worked out promptly enough. At least to my own satisfaction. Hypnotism! All I'd seen and heard and felt had been transmitted to my brain from that of the red-eyed stranger. He had broken into my room somehow, and from the moment of his entrance had taken hypnotic charge of my thoughts. Why? For the purpose of common burglary, probably.

"There it was: nothing to be alarmed about. All could be explained in a logical, common sense way. God, what mockery is logic, common sense. . . .

"I FOLLOWED my regular routine for the rest of the day. I kept a tennis engagement in the afternoon, and a dinner engagement in the evening. But I went back to my rooms early. I was thick-witted from lack of sleep, and felt that an extra long night of rest was in order.

"Now, on that second night I was sure I'd be let alone. Having been convinced by the black felt hat that my visitor was solid and mortal enough, I had put him comfortably out of my thoughts. It seemed reasonable that the midnight marauder would avoid visiting the same spot two evenings in succession.

The man with the curious eyes would know that this time I'd be prepared for him. He'd stay away, of course.

"So, in my ignorance of the unearthly force I was up against, I reasoned. And so, secure in my damned logic, I prepared again for bed.

"I had taken a few precautions, however. My man, instead of going home to his own rooms, was to sleep in my flat that night, in the dining room next door to my bedroom. My automatic, freshly oiled and loaded, was placed on a chair beside my bed. Flix, absolved like his master of 'seeing things,' was to sleep in my bedroom. If the red-eyed trespasser was foolhardy enough to call again, he'd find a warm reception waiting for him!

"Hardly had I got into bed when the opening incident of the night before was repeated: noises coming in from the open window were curiously stilled. Once again it was as though a shell of silence had been drawn about the room. A hush descended in which the beating of my own heart seemed unbearably loud—a hush broken only at rare intervals by some unusually penetrating street noise. A second time I was gripped by the vague horror, the feeling that something terrible and supernatural was threatening me.

"Flix howled once, and scrambled under the bed, where I could hear him squirm in an abject attempt to make himself as small as possible. Flix, who had proved time and again that he would attack man or beast with utter recklessness when his master was menaced!

"Simultaneously with that, I could see, in the dark corner, a pair of clear red eyes grow more and more distinct. And now at last I knew, with a thrill of such fear as I never thought a man could endure, that my visitor was repeating



his call, that it would be his last, and that he—or It—was never of this earth!

**T**HE room was unlighted this time. It was not yet late enough for the moon to slant in the windows. In this thick, even darkness, I saw the eyes come closer and closer to me.

"And now something happened that I hardly know how to tell about.

"It seemed as though those eyes were, somehow, drawing the soul and mind and consciousness of me out of the shell of my body and into their own red depths! They were draining the real me from the mold of my flesh!

"I panted and groaned as I tried to combat the hypnotic glare of those eyes in which desperation and resolve were blended in equal parts. I strained to reach the gun on the chair beside me, and a long drawn out, soft high sounded in my ears, and a voice said: 'Go to sleep. Do not struggle. Go to sleep.'

"I felt darkness close around my senses like a blanket. And I was washed with great waves of terror. I must not lose consciousness! This thing with the red eyes must not bind me, helpless, for my own destruction!

"I groaned, 'Flix!' I whispered. 'Flix! Get him, boy, get him.'

"I heard a faint whimper from under the bed, but that was all. I remembered my man, who was staying here at my orders.

"Saunders! Here—for God's sake.'

"With the last words my whispering had sunk to inaudibility. There was no move in the hall to indicate that Saunders had heard my low cry and was coming.

"And still those fearful red eyes bored into mine, draining me, draining me, pulling the heart and soul and mind of me.

"Go to sleep,' the voice crooned again. 'To sleep. . . .'

"Frantically I willed to stay awake. It was essential to the thing's plan that I lose consciousness. Well, that I would not do!

"But I knew as I vowed it that it was beyond my power to resist. This creature, whatever he was, and from whatever unearthly sphere, was stronger willed than I.

"Things blackened before me. I was sinking into oblivion. I could see only those hypnotic red eyes. They too faded. I was done!

**W**HEN I next woke, or rather, partially woke, the moon had circled the sky so that its first steep rays were crawling over the window sill. I strained to wake fully, and to get my bearings; I could do neither. Swallowed in a black sea of fear I lay in a coma while the awful, unbelievable drama played itself out. I will try to tell about it, just as it happened.

"I saw the red eyes again. But it seemed to me they came from the bed. My bed! From a shadowy head resting on the pillow. My pillow! From a vaguely seen, tanned and square-jawed face that was horribly, impossibly familiar to me. . . .

"I glanced down, and my eyes rested on the arm of a chair—the chair in which for a fleeting second I had seen the dim, emaciated body the night before. But surely I was still in the bed. How had I got to the chair? Or—was I in the chair?

"For a moment I stumbled in a dread shadowland where I was in two places at once—and in neither place. Oh. . . . I can't describe it.

"The voice sounded in my ears that I had heard before. And the voice, one moment, seemed to come from the figure lying on the bed; and the next, from the chair. And when it came from the chair, I was in the bed, and when it—oh, God!

"The voice rambled along, not as though addressing me, but as if speaking aloud the thoughts of the mind that ruled it:

"I am taking his body. In another moment the transfer will be complete. I shall have escaped death. The terrors that infest this globe! The crude perils, the bestial men and raw, untamed elements! Above all, the awful diseases!

"Exiled! I shall never get back to the lovely globe called, by these brute people, Mars. My own body, evolved to exist in its thinner air, is about to die of their hideous diseases. My new body, evolved for earth's atmosphere, will never let me go back. The puny, insufficient lungs in this small chest. . . .

"I am an exile for all of time! Doomed to live here, in one body or another, till I tire of it and allow my spirit to die with whatever form encases it at the moment. Was it for this I went exploring, on the wings of thought?"

"THESE were the words I heard in that low, strange voice. And toward the end of the fantastic soliloquy, I noticed something that sent my senses reeling, and plunged me once more into unconsciousness.

"The voice, shifting less and less often from the form on the bed to the form in the chair, at last was coming continually from the bed! And the voice was now my own voice! And I who heard it was sitting definitely in the chair!

"That was the last thing I knew for an unguessable length of time.

"My next awakening was slower, more complete and normal. But if the awakening was normal—the surroundings, the conditions I woke to find myself in, were not! They were unbelievable! Impossible! Terrible!

"My first sensation was that I was cold. Frightfully cold. Yet somehow I did not suffer.

"I could feel under me a frigid, smooth slab of something. It felt like marble to the touch of my limp hands. I could dimly hear a constant dripping of water. A grim odor came to me—a mixture of chemicals and death. If death were a flower, and a perfume were distilled from that flower, it would be somewhat like the ghastly aroma that came to my nostrils then.

"I tried to move, and could not. I tried to speak, and felt my lips stiff and cold as ice. I tried to open my eyes, and felt my eyelids like twin small curtains of ice that would not move.

"Then I sensed a figure bending over my prone body. I heard words that brought shriek after shriek to my ice cold lips, battering there for the utterance they were denied.

"I have never seen such a curious enlargement of the chest,' the unseen person was saying. 'The lungs must be huge. I wonder. . . . We must have an autopsy. And how wasted the body is! The man was a walking pest-house. Where did you find him?'

"Floating in the river,' answered another unseen one. 'No marks of identification of any kind.'

"THE unseen talkers moved away. While I—I wrestled with the cold flesh that tied me down. Wrestled, and was hopelessly defeated. For I was dead. . . .

"After a time I discovered something that gave me a slight ray of hope—not that I could regain my own healthy, living body which this traveler from a far planet had usurped, but that I might tell my story and have the usurper killed before he stole other people's bodies.

"I found that, with his wasted, disease-racked, dead frame, I had inherited some slight trace of his marvelous ability to will himself

from place to place. I could not move the solid flesh by thought transference as he could; but I could transport my intelligence, clothed in a semblance of the body.

"When I stopped wrestling with the cold clay that tied my spirit down, I found I could rise quite easily. Too easily, in fact, for no thing of weight ever soared as lightly upward as I did.

"From beside the marble slab I stared down at the shell I had left, but to which I was still chained. I saw, line for line, the body of the monster that had robbed me of life and flesh. The tall, emaciated form; the long, thin hands, covered with fine, mouse-colored fur; the sunken cheeks; the enormous chest, twice as big as that of any average mortal—in a word, the body you seem to see me wearing now.

"I gazed, soul-sick, at that travesty of the human form, and reflected that I would shortly be exiled with it to the grave. Exile? The creature who had robbed me faced an exile far less fearful than mine!

"And then I came to you. For you, George, will try to have this story published, and let the people know of the alien horror that stalks in their midst. And you will try to get justice done the murderer of—John Carmody."

**A**T the mention of that name I felt the breath catch in my throat, while my heart pounded in the grip of a superstitious terror.

I had been amazed at this stranger's mention of a dog named Flix, and utterly astounded at his further mention of a servant named Saunders. For both those names were familiar to me. Now, to have him go on and claim he was John Carmody, one of my closest friends and as husky a young athlete as ever inherited a million dollars, was appalling!

But I climbed determinedly out of my momentary lapse into credulity. These were names any one could find out easily.

"You think I'm mad, don't you?" said the tall stranger. "I swear I'm not. George, look at me! Closely! My eyes—my expression."

Almost against my will I searched that pallid face, now disclosed to me by the turning down of the coat collar. Of course I found there no shadow of proof of the madman's claim. The eyes were certainly not those of my friend, Carmody. Nor were they red.

There was nothing to be done but call assistance and have the maniac put away as gently as possible. I got up from the chair before my typewriter, and moved close to him.

"I'VE taken down your story," I told him soothingly. "I'll see that it's brought to public notice, and that justice is done. Now don't you think you ought to turn in for the rest of the night? I'll call the room clerk and have him find a place for you—"

"I read your thoughts as though your forehead were made of glass," said the man wearily. "Well, I didn't really hope I'd be believed. I could only try. And now I've got to be getting back to my body."

"Your body is right here," I said. "Don't worry."

"You fool!" he blazed. "If you don't believe what I'm telling you—try to touch me. Your hand will go through me as it would through a bit of fog."

With this I turned to the telephone. Regardless of the risk to his feeble body, it was time to end this farce. I must phone the house doctor, and have him put in custody.

Hardly had I turned my back when some sixth sense warned me to whirl around again.

I did so, crouching instinctively to defend myself against a maniacal attack—

The man was gone.

Dumbfounded, I glanced around the room. There was nowhere he could have hid. I dashed to the door, though I was sure he could not have reached it in the second my back was turned to him. There was no one in the long corridor outside.

The man had gone, as though he had indeed been but an intelligence clothed in the mere semblance of a body—a bit of fog dispelled by a breeze.

**S**UCH was my strange visitor's story, set down precisely as he dictated it. Such was his exit.

A creature from distant Mars dragging his body here by thought transference? Attacked unexpectedly by half a dozen fatal diseases unknown on his sphere? Projecting his iron will from his own dying, huge-chested frame into the small-chested frame of an earth-man, and hence chaining himself forever to the denser atmosphere of earth? Who would believe such a thing!

I didn't, of course. But, more for curiosity than any other reason, I began some quiet investigating. The results were rather strange.

Well, I'll give them to you so that you may have all the facts in your judging of this fantastic tale.

John Carmody is at this moment

—two days after the eery visit the pouter-pigeon of a man paid me—still in his town flat. I called on him, and he refused to see me, though we have been close friends for years. He sent out word that he was preparing for a long trip and was at that time too busy to see anybody.

Saunders confided to me that he is going to leave Carmody's employ as soon as he can. In the last two days Carmody has been acting so strangely that Saunders is uneasy: he denies himself to all his old friends, and constantly performs deep-breathing and other chest expanding exercises. Too, his eyes have taken on a curious reddish tinge that alarms and puzzles Saunders.

Carmody's dog, Flix, had to be taken away day before yesterday. It had gone mad; and alternately tried to attack his master, and fled howling from him.

On a marble slab in the morgue lies a most unusual corpse. It is the body of a very tall man, incredibly emaciated, with fine furry hair on the backs of the hands, and with a malformation of the chest that makes it look like the remains of an enormous pouter-pigeon. In every detail it is the twin brother of the madman who called on me six hours after this one's reported death.

These are the facts. Make of them what you wish.

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