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# STARTLING STORIES

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## A Complete Novel



### Against the Fall of Night

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

by JOHN D.



She stood there,  
right in the mid-  
dle of the gawk

## Ring Around

**T**HE prosecuting attorney was a lean specimen named Amery Heater. The buildup given the murder trial by the newspapers had resulted in a welter of open-mouthed citizens who jammed the golden oak courtroom.

Bill Maloney, the defendant, was sleepy and bored. He knew he had no business being bored. Not with twelve righteous citizens who, under the spell of Amery Heat-

er's quiet, confidential oratory were beginning to look at Maloney as though he were a fiend among fiends.

The August heat was intense and flies buzzed around the upper sashes of the dusty windows. The city sounds drifted in the open windows, making it necessary for Amery Heater to raise his voice now and again.

But though Bill Maloney was bored, he

**Bill Maloney Opens the Doorway to Other**

MacDONALD



## *the Redhead*

was also restless and worried. Mostly he was worried about Justin Marks, his own lawyer.

Marks cared but little for this case. But, being Bill Maloney's best friend, he couldn't very well refuse to handle it. Justin Marks was a proper young man with a Dewey mustache and frequent daydreams about Justice Marks of the Supreme Court. He somehow didn't feel that the Maloney case

was going to help him very much.

Particularly with the very able Amery Heater intent on getting the death penalty.

The judge was a puffy old citizen with signs of many good years at the brandy bottle, the hundreds of gallons of which surprisingly had done nothing to dim the keenness of eye or brain.

Bill Maloney was a muscular young man with a round face, a round chin and a look

***Worlds, and Finds—the Stuff of Dreams!***

of sleepy skepticism. A sheaf of his coarse, corn-colored hair jutted out over his forehead. His eyes were clear, deep blue.

He stifled a yawn, remembering what Justin Marks had told him about making a good impression on the jury. He singled out a plump lady juror in the front row and winked solemnly at her. She lifted her chin with an audible sniff.

No dice there. Might as well listen to Amery Heater.

"... and we, the prosecution, intend to prove that on the evening of July tenth, William Howard Maloney did murderously attack his neighbor, James Finch and did kill James Finch by crushing his skull. We intend to prove there was a serious dispute between these men, a dispute that had continued for some time. We further intend to prove that the cause of this dispute was the dissolute life being led by the defendant."

**A**MERY HEATER droned on and on. The room was too hot. Bill Maloney slouched in his chair and yawned. He jumped when Justin Marks hissed at him. Then he remembered that he had yawned and he smiled placatingly at the jury. Several of them looked away, hurriedly.

Fat little Doctor Koobie took the stand. He was sworn in and Amery Heater, polite and respectful, asked questions which established Koobie's name, profession and presence at the scene of the "murder" some fifty minutes after it had taken place.

"And now, Dr. Koobie, would you please describe in your own words exactly what you found."

Koobie hitched himself in his chair, pulled his trousers up a little over his chubby knees and said, "No need to make this technical. I was standing out by the hedge between the two houses. I was on Jim Finch's side of the hedge. There was a big smear of blood around. Some of it was spattered on the hedge. Barberry, I think. On the ground there was some hunks of brain tissue, none of them bigger than a dime. Also a piece of scalp maybe two inches square. Had Jim's hair on it all right. Proved that in the lab. Also found some pieces of bone. Not many." He smiled peacefully. "Guess old Jim is dead all right. No question of that. Blood was his and the hair was his."

Three jurors swallowed visibly and a fourth began to fan himself vigorously.

Koobie answered a few other questions

and then Justin Marks took over the cross-examination.

"What would you say killed Jim Finch?"

Many people gasped at the question, having assumed that the defence would be that, lacking a body, there was no murder.

Koobie put a fat finger in the corner of his mouth, took it out again. "Couldn't rightly say."

"Could a blow from a club or similar weapon have done it?"

"Good Lord, no! Man's head is a pretty durable thing. You'd have to back him up against a solid concrete wall and bust him with a full swing with a baseball bat and you still wouldn't do that much hurt. Jim was standing right out in the open."

"Dr. Koobie, imagine a pair of pliers ten feet long and porportionately thick. If a pair of pliers like that were to have grabbed Mr. Finch by the head, smashing it like a nut in a nut-cracker, could it have done that much damage?"

Koobie pulled his nose, tugged on his ear, frowned and said, "Why, if it clamped down real sudden like, I imagine it could. But where'd Jim go?"

"That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

Amery Heater called other witnesses. One of them was Anita Hempflet.

Amery said, "You live across the road from the defendant?"

Miss Anita Hempflet was fiftyish, big-boned, and of the same general consistency as the dried beef recommended for Canadian canoe trips. Her voice sounded like fingernails on the third grade blackboard.

"Yes I do. I've lived there thirty-five years. That Maloney person, him sitting right over there, moved in two years ago, and I must say that I..."

"You are able to see Mr. Maloney's house from your windows?"

"Certainly!"

"Now tell the court when it was that you first saw the red-headed woman."

She licked her lips. "I first saw that... that woman in May. A right pleasant morning it was, too. Or it was until I saw her. About ten o'clock, I'd say. She was right there in Maloney's front yard, as bold as brass. Had on some sort of shiny silver thing. You couldn't call it a dress. Too short for that. Didn't half cover her the way a lady ought to be covered. Not by half. She was..."

"What was she doing?"

"Well, she come out of the house and she stopped and looked around as though she was surprised at where she was. My eyes are good. I could see her face. She looked all around. Then she sort of slouched, like she was going to keel over or something. She walked real slow down toward the gate. Mr. Maloney came running out of the house and I heard him yell to her. She stopped. Then he was making signs to her, for her to go back into the house. Just like she was deaf or something. After a while she went back in. I guessed she probably was made deaf by that awful bomb thing the government lost control of near town three days before that."

"You didn't see her again?"

"Oh, I saw her plenty of times. But after that she was always dressed more like a girl should be dressed. Far as I could figure out, Mr. Maloney was buying her clothes in town. It wasn't right that anything like that should be going on in a nice neighborhood. Mr. Finch didn't think it was right either. Runs down property values, you know."

"In your knowledge, Miss Hempflet, did Mr. Maloney and the deceased ever quarrel?"

"They started quarreling a few days after that woman showed up. Yelling at each other across the hedge. Mr. Finch was always scared of burglars. He had that house fixed up so nobody could get in if he didn't want them in. A couple of times I saw Bill Maloney pounding on his door and rapping on the windows. Jim wouldn't pay any attention."

Justin cross-examined.

"You say, Miss Hempflet, that the defendant was going down and shopping for this woman, buying her clothes. In your knowledge, did he buy her anything else?"

Anita Hempflet sniggered. "Say so! Guess she must of been feeble minded. I asked around and found out he bought a blackboard and chalk and some kids' books."

"Did you make any attempt to find out where this woman came from, this woman who was staying with Mr. Maloney?"

"Should say I did! I know for sure that she didn't come in on the train or Dave Wattle would've seen her. If she'd come by bus, Myrtle Gisco would have known it. Johnny Farness didn't drive her in from the airport. I figure that any woman who'd live openly with a man like Maloney must have hitchhiked into town. She didn't come any other way."

"That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

MALONEY sighed. He couldn't understand why Justin was looking so worried. Everything was going fine. According to plan. He saw the black looks the jury was giving him, but he wasn't worried. Why, as soon as they found out what had actually happened, they'd be all for him. Justin Marks seemed to be sweating.

He came back to the table and whispered to Bill, "How about temporary insanity?"

"I guess it's okay if you like that sort of thing."

"No. I mean as a plea!"

Maloney stared at him. "Justy, old boy. Are you nuts? All we have to do is tell the truth."

Justin Marks rubbed his mustache with his knuckle and made a small bleating sound that acquired him a black look from the judge.

Amery Heater built his case up very cleverly and very thoroughly. In fact, the jury had Bill Maloney so definitely electrocuted that they were beginning to give him sad looks—full of pity.

It took Amery Heater two days to complete his case. When it was done, it was a solid and shining structure, every discrepancy explained—everything pinned down. Motive. Opportunity. Everything.

On the morning of the third day, the court was tense with expectancy. The defence was about to present its case. No one knew what the case was, except, of course, Bill Maloney, Justin Marks, and the unworldly red-head who called herself Rejapachalandakeena. Bill called her Keena. She hadn't appeared in court.

Justin Marks stood up and said to the hushed court, "Your Honor. Rather than summarize my defence at this point, I would like to put William Maloney on the stand first and let him tell the story in his own words."

The court buzzed. Putting Maloney on the stand would give Amery Heater a chance to cross-examine. Heater would rip Maloney to tiny shreds. The audience licked its collective chops.

"Your name?"

"William Maloney, 12 Braydon Road."

"And your occupation?"

"Tinkering. Research, if you want a fancy name."

"Where do you get your income?"

"I've got a few gimmicks patented. The royalties come in."

"Please tell the court all you know about this crime of which you are accused. Start at the beginning, please."

Bill Maloney shoved the blonde hair back off his forehead with a square, mechanic's hand and smiled cheerfully at the jury. Some of them, before they realized it, had smiled back. They felt the smiles on their lips and sobered instantly. It wasn't good form to smile at a vicious murderer.

Bill slouched in the witness chair and laced his fingers across his stomach.

"It all started," he said, "the day the army let that rocket get out of hand on the seventh of May. I've got my shop in my cellar. Spend most of my time down there.

"That rocket had an atomic warhead, you know. I guess they've busted fifteen generals over that affair so far. It exploded in the hills forty miles from town. The jar upset some of my apparatus and stuff. Put it out of kilter. I was sore.

"I turned around, cussing away to myself, and where my coal bin used to be, there was a room. The arch leading into the room was wide and I could see in. I tell you, it really shook me up to see that room there. I wondered for a minute if the bomb hadn't given me delusions.

"The room I saw didn't have any furniture in it. Not like furniture we know. It had some big cubes of dull silvery metal, and some smaller cubes. I couldn't figure out the lighting.

"Being a curious cuss, I walked right through the arch and looked around. I'm a great one to handle things. The only thing in the room I could pick up was a gadget on top of the biggest cube. It hardly weighed a thing.

"In order to picture it, you've got to imagine a child's hoop made of silvery wire. Then right across the wire imagine the blackest night you've ever seen, rolled out into a thin sheet and stretched tight like a drumhead on that wire hoop.

"As I was looking at it I heard some sort of deep vibration and there I was, stumbling around in my coal bin. The room was gone. But I had that darn hoop in my hand. That hoop with the midnight stretched across it.

"I took it back across to my workbench where the light was better. I held it in one hand and poked a finger at that black stuff. My finger went right through. I didn't feel

a thing. With my finger still sticking through it, I looked on the other side.

"It was right there that I named the darn thing. I said, 'Gawk!' And that's what I've called it ever since. The Gawk. My finger didn't come through on the other side. I stuck my whole arm through. No arm. I pulled it back out. Quick. Arm was okay. Somehow it seemed warmed on the other side of the gawk.

"Well, you can imagine what it was like for me, a tinkerer, to get my hands on a thing like that. I forgot all about meals and so on. I had to find out what it was and why. I couldn't see my own hand on the other side of it. I put it right up in front of my face, reached through from the back and tried to touch my nose. I couldn't do it. I reached so deep that without the gawk there, my arm would have been halfway through my head . . ."

"Objection!" Amery Heater said. "All this has nothing to do with the fact . . ."

"My client," Justin said, "is giving the incidents leading up to the alleged murder."

"Overruled," the judge said.

**M**ALONEY said, "Thanks. I decided that my arm had to be someplace when I stuffed it through the gawk. And it wasn't in this dimension. Maybe not even in this time. But it had to be someplace. That meant that I had to find out what was on the other side of the gawk. I could use touch, sight. Maybe I could climb through. It intrigued me, you might say.

"I started with touch. I put my hand through, held it in front of me and walked. I walked five feet before my hand rammed up against something. I felt it. It seemed to be a smooth wall. There wasn't such a wall in my cellar.

"There has to be some caution in science. I didn't stuff my head through. I couldn't risk it. I had the hunch there might be something unfriendly on the other side of the gawk. I turned the thing around and stuck my hand through from the other side. No wall. There was a terrific pain. I yanked my hand back. A lot of little bloodvessels near the surface had broken. I dropped the gawk and jumped around for a while. Found out I had a bad case of frostbite. The broken bloodvessels indicated that I had stuffed my hand into a vacuum. Frostbite in a fraction of a second indicated nearly absolute zero. It seemed that maybe I had put my hand

into space. It made me glad it had been my hand instead of my head.

"I propped the thing up on my bench and shoved lots of things through, holding them a while and bringing them back out. Made a lot of notes on the effect of absolute zero on various materials.

"By that time I was bushed. I went up to bed. Next day I had some coffee and then built myself a little periscope. Shoved it through. Couldn't see a thing. I switched the gawk, tested with a thermometer, put my hand through. Warm enough. But the periscope didn't show me a thing. I wondered if maybe something happened to light rays when they went through that blackness. Turns out that I was right.

"By about noon I had found out another thing about it. Every time I turned it around I was able to reach through into a separate and distinct environment. I tested that with the thermometer. One of the environments I tested slammed the mercury right out through the top of the glass and broke the glass and burned my hand. I was glad I hadn't hit that one the first time. It would have burned my hand off at the wrist.

"I began to keep a journal of each turn of the gawk, and what seemed to be on the other side of it. I rigged up a jig on my work bench and began to grope through the gawk with my fireplace tongs.

"Once I jabbed something that seemed to be soft and alive. Those tongs were snatched right through the gawk. Completely gone. It gave me the shudders, believe me. If it had been my hand instead of the tongs, I wouldn't be here. I have a hunch that whatever snatched those tongs would have been glad to eat me.

"I rigged up some grappling hooks and went to work. Couldn't get anything. I put a lead weight on some cord and lowered it through. Had some grease on the end of the weight. When the cord slacked off, I pulled it back up. There was fine yellow sand on the bottom of the weight. And I had lowered it thirty-eight feet before I hit sand.

"On try number two hundred and eight, I brought an object back through the gawk. Justy has it right there in his bag. Show it to the people, Justy."

Justin looked annoyed at the informal request, but he unstrapped the bag and took out an object. He passed it up to the judge who looked at it with great interest. Then it was passed through the jury. It ended up

on the table in front of the bench, tagged as an exhibit.

"You can see, folks, that such an object didn't come out of our civilization."

"Objection!" Heater yelled. "The defendant could have made it."

"Hush up!" the judge said.

"Thanks. As you can see that object is a big crystal. That thing in the crystal is a golden scorpion, about five times life size. The corner is sawed off there because Jim Finch sawed it off. You notice that he sawed off a big enough piece to get a hunk of the scorpion's leg. Jim told me that leg was solid gold. That whole bug is solid gold. I guess it was an ornament in some other civilization.

"Now that gets me around to Jim Finch. As you all know, Jim retired from the jewelry business about five years ago. Jim was a pretty sharp trader. You know how he parlayed his savings across the board so that he owned a little hunk of just about everything in town. He was always after me to let him in on my next gimmick. I guess those royalty checks made his mouth water. We weren't what you'd call friends. I passed the time of day with him, but he wasn't a friendly man.

"Anyway, when I grabbed this bug out of the gawk, I thought of Jim Finch. I wanted to know if such a thing could be made by a jeweler. Jim was home and his eyes popped when he saw it. You know how he kept that little shop in his garage and made presents for people? Well, he cut off a section with a saw. Then he said that he'd never seen anything like it and he didn't know how on earth it was put together. I told him that it probably wasn't put together on earth. That teased him a little and he kept after me until I told him the whole story. He didn't believe it. That made me mad. I took him over into my cellar and showed him a few things. I set the gawk between two boxes so it was parallel to the floor, then dropped my grapples down into it. In about three minutes I caught something and brought it up. It seemed to be squirming."

**M**ALONEY drew a deep breath. "That made me a shade cautious. I brought it up slow. The head of the thing came out. It was like a small bear—but more like a bear that had been made into a rug. Flat like a leech, and instead of front

legs it just seemed to have a million little sucker disks around the flat edge. It screamed so hard, with such a high note, that it hurt my ears. I dropped it back through.

"When I looked around, old Jim was backed up against the cellar wall, mumbling. Then he got down on his hands and knees and patted the floor under the gawk. He kept right on mumbling. Pretty soon he asked me how that bear-leech and that golden bug could be in the same place. I explained how I had switched the gawk. We played around for a while and then came up with a bunch of stones. Jim handled them, and his eyes started to pop out again. He began to shake. He told me that one of the stones was an uncut ruby. You couldn't prove it by me. It would've made you sick to see the way old Jim started to drool. He talked so fast I could hardly understand him. Finally I got the drift. He wanted us to go in business and rig up some big machinery so we could dig through the gawk and come back with all kinds of things. He wanted bushels of rubies and a few tons of gold.

"I told him I wasn't interested. He got so mad he jumped up and down. I told him I was going to fool around with the thing for a while and then I was going to turn it over to some scientific foundation so the boys could go at it in the right way.

"He looked mad enough to kill me. He told me we could have castle and cars and yachts and a million bucks each. I told him that the money was coming in faster than I could spend it already and all I wanted was to stay in my cellar and tinker.

"I told him that I guessed the atomic explosion had dislocated something, and the end product belonged to science. I also told him very politely to get the devil home and stop bothering me.

"He did, but he sure hated to leave. Well, by the morning of the tenth, I had pretty well worn myself out. I was bushed and jittery from no sleep. I had made twenty spins in a row without getting anything, and I had begun to think I had run out of new worlds on the other side of the gawk.

"Like a darn fool, I yanked it off the jig, took it like a hoop and scaled it across the cellar. It went high, then dropped lightly, spinning.

"And right there in my cellar was this beautiful red-head. She was dressed in a shiny silver thing. Justy's got that silver thing in his bag. Show it to the people. You

can see that it's made out of some sort of metal mesh, but it isn't cold like metal would be. It seems to hold heat and radiate it."

The metal garment was duly passed around. Everybody felt of it, exclaimed over it. This was better than a movie. Maloney could see from Amery Heater's face that the man wanted to claim the metal garment was also made in the Maloney cellar.

Bill winked at him. Amery Heater flushed a dull red.

"Well, she stood there, right in the middle of the gawk which was flat against the floor. She had a dazed look on her face. I asked her where she had come from. She gave me a blank look and a stream of her own language. She seemed mad about something. And pretty upset.

"Now what I should have done was pick up that gawk and lift it back up over her head. That would have put her back in her own world. But she stepped out of it, and like a darn fool, I stood and held it and spun it, nervous like. In spinning it, I spun her own world off into some mathematical equation I couldn't figure.

"It was by the worst or the best kind of luck, depending on how you look at it, that I made a ringer on her when I tossed the gawk across the cellar. Her makeup startled me a little. No lipstick. Tiny crimson beads on the end of each eyelash. Tiny emerald green triangles painted on each tooth in some sort of enamel. Nicely centered. Her hairdo wasn't any wackier than some you see every day.

"Well, she saw the gawk in my hands and she wasn't dumb at all. She came at me, her lips trembling, her eyes pleading, and tried to step into it. I shook my head, hard, and pushed her back and set it back in the jig. I shoved a steel rod through, holding it in asbestos mittens. The heat beyond the blackness turned the whole rod cherry red in seconds. I shoved it on through the rest of the way, then showed her the darkened mitten. She was quick. She got the most horrified look on her face.

"Then she ran upstairs, thinking it was some sort of joke, I guess. I noticed that she slammed right into the door, as though she expected it to open for her. By the time I got to her, she had figured out the knob. She went down the walk toward the gate.

"That's when nosey Anita must have seen her. I shouted and she turned around and



the tears were running right down her face. I made soothing noises and she let me lead her back into the house. I've never seen a prettier girl or one stacked any . . . I mean her skin is translucent, sort of. Her eyes are enormous. And her hair is a shade of red that you never see.

"She had no place to go and she was my responsibility. I certainly didn't feel like turning her over to the welfare people. I fixed her up a place to sleep in my spare room and I had to show her everything. How to turn on a faucet. How to turn the lights off and on.

"She didn't do anything except cry for four days. I gave her food that she didn't eat. She was a mess. Worried me sick. I didn't have any idea how to find her world again. No idea at all. Of course, I could have popped her into any old world, but it didn't seem right.

"On the fourth day I came up out of the cellar and found her sitting in a chair looking at a copy of *See Magazine*. She seemed very much interested in the pictures of the women. She looked up at me and smiled. That was the day I went into town and came back with a mess of clothes for her. I had to show her how a zipper worked, and how to button a button."

**H**E LOOKED as if that might have been fun.

"After she got all dressed up, she smiled some more and that evening she ate well. I kept pointing to things and saying the right name for them.

"I tell you, once she heard the name for something, she didn't forget it. It stayed right with her. Nouns were easy. The other words were tough. About ten that night I finally caught her name. It was Rejapachalandakeena. She seemed to like to have me call her Keena. The first sentence she said was, 'Where is Keena?'

"That is one tough question. Where is here and now? Where is this world, anyway? On what side of what dimension? In which end of space? On what twisted convolution of the time stream? What good is it to say 'This is the world'. It just happens to be our world. Now I know that there are plenty of others.

"Writing came tougher for her than the sounds of the words. She showed me her writing. She took a piece of paper, held the pencil pointing straight up and put the

paper on top of the rug. Then she worked that pencil like a pneumatic hammer, starting at the top right corner and going down the page. I couldn't figure it until she read it over, and made a correction by sticking in one extra hole in the paper. I saw then that the pattern of holes was very precise—like notes on a sheet of music.

"She went through the grade school readers like a flash. I was buying her some arithmetic books one day, and when I got back she said, 'Man here while Billy gone.' She was calling me Billy. 'Keena hide,' she said.

"Well, the only thing missing was the gawk, and with it, Keena's chance to make a return to her own people. I thought immediately of Jim Finch. I ran over and pounded on his door. He undid the chain so he could talk to me through a five inch crack, but I couldn't get in. I asked him if he had stolen the little item. He told me that I'd better run to the police and tell them exactly what it was that I had lost, and then I could tell the police exactly how I got it. I could tell by the look of naked triumph in his eyes that he had it. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

"Keena's English improved by leaps and bounds and pretty soon she was dipping into my texts on chemistry and physics. She seemed puzzled. She told me that we were like her people a few thousand years back. Primitives. She told me a lot about her world. No cities. The houses are far apart. No work. Everyone is assigned to a certain cultural pursuit, depending on basic ability. She was a designer. In order to train herself, she had had to learn the composition of all fabricated materials used in her world.

"I took notes while she talked. When I get out of this jam, I'm going to revolutionize the plastics industry. She seemed bright enough to be able to take in the story of how she suddenly appeared in my cellar. I gave it to her slow and easy.

"When I was through, she sat very still for a long time. Then she told me that some of the most brilliant men of her world had long ago found methods of seeing into other worlds beyond their own. They had borrowed things from worlds more advanced than their own, and had thus been able to avoid mistakes in the administration of their own world. She told me that it was impossible that her departure should go unnoticed. She said that probably at the moment of her

disappearance, all the resources of a great people were being concentrated on that spot where she had been standing talking to some friends. She told me that some trace of the method would be found and that they would then scan this world, locate her and take her back.

"I asked her if it would be easier if we had the gawk, and she said that it wasn't necessary, and that if it was, she would merely go next door and see Jim Finch face to face. She said she had a way, once she looked into his eyes, of taking over the control of his involuntary muscles and stopping his heartbeat.

"I gasped, and she smiled sweetly and said that she had very nearly done it to me when I had kept her from climbing back through the gawk. She said that everybody in her world knew how to do that. She also said that most adults knew how to create, out of imagination images that would respond to physical tests. To prove it she stared at the table. In a few seconds a little black box slowly appeared out of misty nothingness. She told me to look at it. I picked it up. It was latched. I opened it. Her picture smiled out at me. She was standing before the entrance of a white castle that seemed to reach to the clouds.

"Suddenly it was gone. She explained that when she stopped thinking of it, it naturally disappeared, because that was what had caused it. Her thinking. I asked her why she didn't think up a doorway to her own world and then step through it while she was still thinking about it. She said that she could only think up things by starting with their basic physical properties and working up from there, like a potter starts with clay.

"So I stopped heckling Jim Finch at about that time. I was sorry, because I wanted the gawk back. Best toy I'd ever had. Once I got a look in Jim's garage window. He'd forgot to pull the shade down all the way. He had the gawk rigged up on a stand, and had a big arm, like the bucket on a steam shovel rigged up, only just big enough to fit through the hoop. He wasn't working it when I saw him. He was digging up the concrete in the corner of his cellar. He was using a pick and he had a shovel handy. He was pale as death. I saw then that he had a human arm in there on the floor and blood all over. The bucket was rigged with jagged teeth. It didn't take much imagina-

tion to figure out what Jim had done.

"Some poor innocent character in one of those other worlds had had a massive contraction come out of nowhere and chaw his arm off. I thought of going to the police, and then I thought of how easy it would be for Jim Finch to get me stuck away in a padded cell, while he stayed on the outside, all set to pull more arms off more people."

**H**EATER glanced uneasily at the jury. They were drinking it in.

"I told Keena about it and she smiled. She told me that Jim was digging into many worlds and that some of them were pretty advanced. I gradually got the idea that old Jim was engaging in as healthy an occupation as a small boy climbing between the bars and tickling the tigers. I began to worry about old Jim a little. You all know about that couple of bushels of precious stones that were found in his house. That's what made him tickle the tigers. But the cops didn't find that arm. I guess that after he got the hole dug, Jim got over his panic and realized that all he had to do was switch the gawk around and toss the arm through. Best place for old razor blades I ever heard of.

"Well, as May turned into June and June went by, Keena got more and more confident of her eventual rescue. As I learned more about her world, I got confident of it too. In a few thousand years we may be as bright as those people. I hope we are. No wars, no disease.

"And the longer she stayed with me, the more upset I got about her leaving me. But it was what she wanted. I guess it's what I'd want, if somebody shoved me back a thousand years B.C. I'd want to get home, but quick.

"On the tenth of July, I got a phone call from Jim Finch. His voice was all quavery like a little old lady. He said, 'Maloney, I want to give that thing back to you. Right away.' Anything Jim Finch gave anybody was a spavined gift horse. I guessed that the gobbles were after him like Keena had hinted.

"So I just laughed at him. Maybe I laughed to cover up the fact that I was a little scared, too. What if some world he messed with dropped a future type atomic bomb back through the gawk into his lap? I told him to burn it up if he was tired of it.

"I didn't know Jim could cuss like that. He said that it wouldn't burn and he couldn't break it or destroy it anyway. He said that he was coming out and throw it across the hedge into my yard right away.

"As I got to my front door, he came running out of his house. He carried the thing like it was going to blow up.

"Just as he got to the hedge, I saw a misty circle in the air over his head. Only it was about ten feet across. A pair of dark blue shiny pliers with jaws as big as the judge's desk there swooped down and caught him by the head. The jaws snapped shut so hard that I could hear sort of a thick, wet, popping sound as all the bones in old Jim's head gave way all at once.

"He dropped the gawk and hung limp in those closed jaws for a moment, then he was yanked up through that misty circle into nothingness. Gone. Right before my eyes. The misty circle drifted down to grass level, and then faded away. The gawk faded right away with it. You know what it made me think of? Of a picnic where you're trying to eat and a bug gets on your arm and bothers you. You pinch it between your thumb and forefinger, roll it once and throw it away. Old Jim was just about as important to those blue steel jaws as a hungry red ant is to you or me. You could call those gems he got crumbs, I guess.

"I was just getting over being sick in my own front yard when Timmy came running over, took one look at the blood and ran back. The police came next. That's all there is to tell. Keena is still around and Justy will bring her in to testify tomorrow."

Bill Maloney yawned and smiled at the jury.

Amery Heater got up, stuck his thumbs inside his belt and walked slowly and heavily over to Bill.

He stared into Bill's smiling face for ten long seconds. Bill shuffled his feet and began to look uncomfortable.

In a low bitter tone, Amery Heater said, "Gawks! Golden scorpions! Tangential worlds! Blue jaws!" He sighed heavily, pointed to the jury and said, "Those are intelligent people, Maloney. No questions!"

The judge had to pound with his gavel to quiet the court. As soon as the room was quiet, he called an adjournment until the following morning.

When Bill Maloney was brought out of his cell into court the next morning, the

jurors gave each other wise looks. It was obvious that the young man had spent a bad night. There were puffy areas under his eyes. He scuffed his heels as he walked, sat down heavily and buried his face in his hands. They wondered why his shoulders seemed to shake.

Justin Marks looked just as bad. Or worse.

Bill was sunk in a dull lethargy, in an apathy so deep that he didn't know where he was, and cared less.

Justin Marks stood up and said, "Your Honor, we request an adjournment of the case for twenty-four hours."

"For what reason?"

"Your Honor, I intended to call the woman known as Keena to the stand this morning. She was in a room at the Hotel Hollyfield. Last night she went up to her room at eleven after I talked with her in the lounge. She hasn't been seen since. Her room is empty. All her possessions are there, but she is gone. I would like time to locate her, your Honor."

The judge looked extremely disappointed.

He pursed his lips and said, in a sweet tone, "You are sure that such a woman actually exists, counsellor?"

Justin Marks turned pale and Amery Heater chuckled.

"Of course, your Honor! Why, only last night . . ."

"Her people came and got her," Bill Maloney said heavily. He didn't look up. The jury shifted restlessly. They had expected to be entertained by a gorgeous redhead. Without her testimony, the story related by Maloney seemed even more absurd than it had seemed when they had heard it. Of course, it would be a shame to electrocute a nice clean young man like that, but really you can't have people going about killing their neighbors and then concocting such a fantasy about it . . .

"What's that?" the judge asked suddenly.

**I**T BEGAN as a hum, so low as to be more of a vibration than a sound. A throb that seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Slowly it increased in pitch and in violence, and if the judge had any more to say on the subject, no one heard him. He appeared to be trying to beat the top of his desk in with the gavel. But the noise couldn't be heard.

Slowly climbing up the audible range, it

filled the court. As it passed the index of vibration of the windows, they shattered, but the falling glass couldn't be heard. A man who had been wearing glasses stared through empty frames.

The sound passed beyond the upper limits of the human ear, became hypersonic, and every person in the courtroom was suddenly afflicted with a blinding headache.

It stopped as abruptly as a scream in the night.

For a moment there was a misty arch in the solid wall. Beyond it was the startling vagueness of a line of blue hills. Hills that didn't belong there.

She came quickly through the arch. It faded. She was not tall, but gave the impression of tallness. Her hair was the startling red of port wine, her skin so translucent as to seem faintly bluish. Her eyes were halfway between sherry and honey. Tiny crimson beads were on the tip of each eyelash. Her warm full lips were parted, and they could all see the little green enameled triangles on her white teeth. Her single garment was like the silver metallic garment they had touched. But it was golden. Without any apparent means of support, it clung to her lovely body, following each line and curve.

She looked around the court. Maloney's eyes were warm blue fire. "Keena!" he gasped. She ran to him, threw herself on him, her arms around his neck, her face hidden in the line of jaw, throat and shoulder. He murmured things to her that the jury strained to hear.

Amery Heater, feeling his case fade away, was the first to recover.

"Hypnotism!" he roared.

It took the judge a full minute of steady pounding to silence the spectators. "One more disturbance like this, and I'll clear the court," he said.

Maloney had come to life. She sat on his lap and they could hear her say, "What are they trying to do to you?"

He smiled peacefully. "They want to kill me, honey. They say I killed Jim Finch."

She turned and her eyes shriveled the jury and the judge.

"Stupid!" she hissed.

There was a little difficulty swearing her in. Justin Marks, his confidence regained, thoroughly astonished at finding that Bill Maloney had been telling the truth all along, questioned Keena masterfully. She backed

up Maloney's story in every particular. Maloney couldn't keep his eyes off her. Her accent was odd, and her voice had a peculiar husky and yet liquid quality.

Justin Marks knuckled his mustache proudly, bowed to Amery Heater and said, "Do you wish to cross-examine?"

Heater nodded, stood up, and walked slowly over. He gave Keena a long and careful look. "Young woman, I congratulate you on your acting ability. Where did you get your training? Surely you've been on the stage."

"Stage?"

"Oh, come now! All this has been very interesting, but now we must discard this dream world and get down to facts. What is your real name?"

"Rejapachalandakeena."

Heater sighed heavily. "I see that you are determined to maintain your silly little fiction. That entrance of yours was somehow engineered by the defendant, I am sure." He turned and smiled at the jury—the smile of a fellow conspirator.

"Miss So-and-so, the defense has all been based on the idea that you come from some other world, or some hidden corner of time, or out of the woodwork. I think that what you had better do is just prove to us that you do come from some other world." His voice dripped with sarcasm. "Just do one or two things for us that we common mortals can't do, please."

Keena frowned, propped her chin on her fist. After a few moments she said, "I do not know completely what you are able to do. Many primitive peoples have learned through a sort of intuition. Am I right in thinking that those people behind that little fence are the ones who decide whether my Billy is to be killed?"

"Correct."

She turned and stared at the jury for a long time. Her eyes passed from face to face, slowly. The jurors were oddly uncomfortable.

She said, "It is very odd. That woman in the second row. The second one from the left. It is odd that she should be there. Not very long ago she gave a poison, some sort of vegetable base poison, to her husband. He was sick for a long time and he died. Is that not against your silly laws?"

The woman in question turned pale green, put her hands to her throat, rolled her eyes up and slid quietly off the chair. No one

made a move to help her. All eyes were on Keena.

Some woman back in the courtroom said shrilly, "I knew there was something funny about the way Dave died! I knew it! Arrest Mrs. Watson immediately!"

Keena's eyes turned toward the woman who had spoken. The woman sat down suddenly.

Keena said, "This man you call Dave. His wife killed him because of you. I can read that in your eyes."

Amery Heater chuckled. "A very good trick, but pure imagination. I rather guess you have been prepared for this situation, and my opponent has briefed you on what to do should I call on you in this way."

Keena's eyes flashed. She said, "You are a most offensive person."

She stared steadily at Amery Heater. He began to sweat. Suddenly he screamed and began to dance about. Smoke poured from his pockets. Blistering his fingers, he threw pocketknife, change, moneyclip on the floor. They glowed dull red, and the smell of scorching wood filled the air.

A wisp of smoke rose from his tie clip, and he tore that off, sucking his blistered fingers. The belt buckle was next. By then the silver coins had melted against the wooden floor. But there was one last thing he had to remove. His shoes. The eyelets were metal. They began to burn the leather.

At last, panting and moaning he stood, surrounded by the cherry red pieces of metal on the floor.

Keena smiled and said softly, "Ah, you have no more metal on you. Would you like

to have further proof?"

Amery Heater swallowed hard. He looked up at the open-mouthed judge. He glanced at the jury.

"The prosecution withdraws," he said hoarsely.

The judge managed to close his mouth.

"Case dismissed," he said. "Young woman, I suggest you go back wherever you came from."

She smiled blandly up at him. "Oh, no! I can't go back. I went back once and found that my world was very empty. They laughed at my new clothes. I said I wanted Billy. They said they would transport him to my world. But Billy wouldn't be happy there. So I came back."

Maloney stood up, yawned and stretched. He smiled at the jury. Two men were helping the woman back up into her chair. She was still green.

He winked at Keena and said, "Come on home, honey."

They walked down the aisle together and out the golden oak doors. Nobody made a sound, or a move to stop them.

Anita Hempflet, extremely conscious of the fact that the man who had left her waiting at the altar thirty-one years before was buried just beyond the corn hills in her vegetable garden, forced her razor lips into a broad smile, beamed around at the people sitting near her and said, in her high, sharp voice:

"Well! That girl is going to make a lovely neighbor! If you folks will excuse me, I'm going to take her over some fresh strawberry preserves."