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NOVELETTES

- THE PROFESSOR SPLITS** by J. Harvey Haggard..... 6
Just a school-boy's unfinished experiment—until the Professor completed it!
- COSMIC DERELICT** by Neil R. Jones..... 82
The death of the patient isn't the only danger involved in brain-transposition!

SERIAL

- QUICKSANDS OF YOUTHWARDNESS** by Malcolm Jameson..... 42
Conclusion
Athanata—planet where age is immortal, and youth cannot live!

SHORT STORIES

- HE WASN'T THERE!** by Hugh Raymond..... 22
If a man offers you 10 years of time-travel for 10 cents—turn him down!
- THE PET NEBULA** by Alfred Bester..... 33
A playful nebula is nice around the house—if your life and property are insured!
- THE KING'S EYE** by James MacCreigh..... 63
Life is violent on Venus—and a death must be paid for by a death.
- MAGNUS' DISINTEGRATOR** by Ray Cummings..... 73
John Magnus' life was worth little—but his death would be of great value!

SPECIAL FEATURES

- FANTASY REVIEWS**..... 4
- VIEWPOINTS** 40
- EDITORAMBLINGS** 81

THE PROFESSOR SPLITS

By J. Harvey Haggard

CHAPTER ONE

Trial and Error

“OUR experiment is a failure.” This mournful soliloquy echoed hollowly throughout the empty classroom, even as a pudgy hand toyed idly with a taut length of piano wire—referred to in the textbook as a “sonometer”—stretched between supports and suspended over a row of tiny electromagnets. It was a foolish student experiment that had to do with vibrations and harmonics, as foolish as that other experiment spinning around and around in the mind of the thinker.

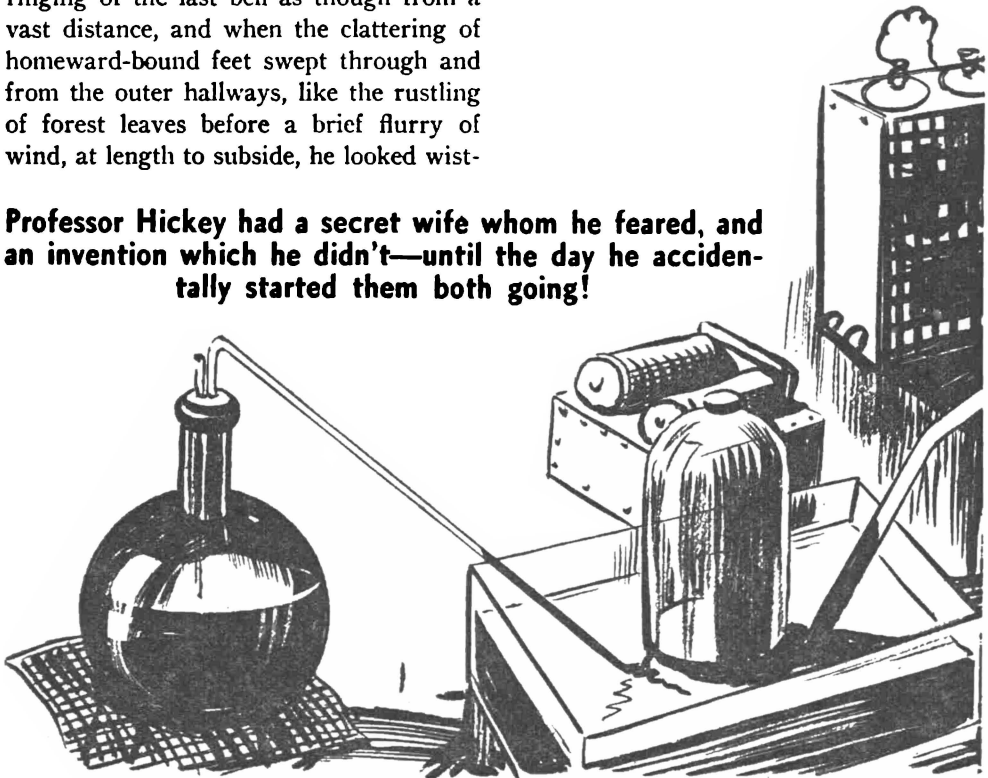
John L. Hickey, professor of Physics I and II in Centerdale High, heard the ringing of the last bell as though from a vast distance, and when the clattering of homeward-bound feet swept through and from the outer hallways, like the rustling of forest leaves before a brief flurry of wind, at length to subside, he looked wist-

fully at the experiment abandoned on the nearest student desk, which was occupied by one of the more brilliant and interested lads. He wished that the abandonment of his own experiment were as easy as that.

He was a rather short and abbreviated man (what there was of him) was Professor Hickey, with a wellworn grey suit that had seen many pressings, a pudgy head like a bleached summer apple, whose thinning hair was fast becoming but a mere halo, and whose eyes were enlarged by enormous horn-rimmed glasses.

“What’s that? What did you say, John?” queried a woman’s voice, and he jumped as though shot. His pensive mood did little to enhance his stout and fortyish appearance.

Professor Hickey had a secret wife whom he feared, and an invention which he didn’t—until the day he accidentally started them both going!





"It won't work out," he said mournfully, strumming the wire till it whined. "Vibrations and er—overtones. Er—"

"John, you didn't mean that. You meant—us!"

He had scarcely heard the quick opening and shutting of the door, the click of a night lock. A prim woman had come into the room, laid several notebooks on the front table, and was moving toward him like an automaton.

"Miss Moon, er—I mean—Mrs. Hic—Hickey," he stammered and looked guiltily around. Of course they were alone, but it sounded so odd for him to call her that. A month now, and they'd been man and wife. Their marriage had been secret, a confidential trial marriage which each felt it best to conceal while still in the try-out stage. . . .

"John," said the secret Mrs. Hickey to her spouse. "I want you to kiss me."

HICKEY shuddered, but did not seek to evade the indomitable command in her voice. It was bad medicine, but he had to take it. Lydia Moon had lines as restricted as though she were encased in a straightjacket. Her freckled face was entirely devoid of cosmetics, and her corn-hued hair was drawn tightly in a mannish bob. She was as practical and unassuming as corned beef and cabbage, but every member of the faculty conceded that she was a good teacher of Biology I.

Closing his eyes, Hickey pursed his lips and kissed her experimentally. After the swift peck at her rigid lips, his dejection descended like a mantle.

"That," said Mrs. Hickey critically, and not trying to conceal the contempt in her voice, "wasn't like Clark Gable did it in 'Glorious Honeymoon'."

"Wasn't it?" demanded Professor Hickey in a disinterested tone, pretending an absorption in the whining shimmer of wire. Secretly he reflected that she was no Gloria Swanson either, that dazzling

feminine creature who fairly exuded an innocent need for the protection of manly arms. But Hickey dreaded such conversations, and their unavoidable complications, and made no mention of it. He had done his miserable best to avoid the company of his trial bride the past few weeks. "It's a silly little idea, the kid had. And yet there's something to it. The wire is vibrating at low C. His idea was to magnetize the central coil, cause an overtone, with each end vibrating round the center, doubling the frequency. That would be an octave higher."

"Interesting, no doubt," said the plain Mrs. Hickey pointedly, "to you—"

Ignoring the mounting portent of her words that sounded almost like a threat, fearing the coming crisis which he had felt for endless days was surely coming, Professor Hickey wrinkled his brow, peered at the shimmer of metal string, and reached over toward a switch. Once thrown, an electric light bulb glowed in the circuit, and he pressed another switch, at which the keening of the wire mounted shrilly.

"See," said Professor Hickey with the air of an Edison. "An octave higher, my dear. Vibrations are peculiar things, aren't they? Now I can open circuits at thirds along the way, or fourths, or so on, and each time the magnetic interference will cause higher overtones, each an individual vibration of higher frequency."

"John Hickey!" shrielled Lydia Moon Hickey, placing her arms akimbo and letting her voice mount to combat the rising crescendo of vibrations. "We can't go on like this! You don't mean all those things you told me, about the moonlight, about the way it made silver in my hair."

Inwardly, Hickey's soul was shuddering to think of some of those things he had uttered. At the moment Mrs. Hickey had all of the appeal of a fire horse. He didn't dare to face the glare in her eyes, so he began shouting absurdities, crazy

things without meaning, without sense.

"Vibrations!" he squawked defensively. "*All matter is a form of vibration!* All things are vibrations, and vibrations are all susceptible to this halving, this multipl—"

"Jo-John! Jo-John!" squeaked the voice, abruptly becoming unbelievably keen. "Jo-John. H-Help m-me! Oooooh!"

THERE was terror in that, enough to cause even the dejected Professor Hickey to whirl. His eyes bulged, for the words were coming in a chorus. He took off his thick glasses, and as the world was blurred from his vision, wiped them and saw—not ONE Mrs. Hickey, but TWO of them, each half size, but both of them flinging arms up in desperate appeal.

Crazy things without meaning, without—

"Good gravy!" expostulated the astounded Professor Hickey, his eyes monstrous behind their lenses. "Her body—matter. Matter—vibrations. And those halving overtones. Those—"

He grabbed for the wire and realized now that its vibration was past hearing, was indeed too high for human ear to record. Suddenly the blur of wire vanished, to be replaced by a cherry red line, and his hand came away.

"Ouch!" managed Professor Hickey, controlling a desire to mutter more vitriolic things, and dancing around with a burned hand between his knees. "Something's wrong. It's vibrating at the frequency of heat waves, and no wire molecules should stand that! It's—"

There were four Mrs. Hickeys now, all dancing around him like an end chorus and pointing up at the table. It was all very kaleidoscopic and hysterical to the amazed little professor of science. The four faces became eight midget ones, all blanched with unbelievable terror. At last it soaked into his mind that he would

have to get to that switch, and that in a hurry, before she went into more microbic fissions, but as he jumped forward some other blundering person staggered toward him, and he went down in a tumbling swearing heap from which he finally extricated himself.

Forgetting his pain, he sprang upright, then gasped, for the entire room seemed to be melting away from him in spurts and bounds. His own body was flickering vaguely as though in a spasmodic shadow dance, with faceted figures splitting away and tumbling back, and the gigantic square column directly in front of him could be nothing else than the—table leg!

He too was subdividing, and rapidly too. Over his head the ceiling was like a lofty darkish blue-hazed vault, and to all sides he saw thousands of the ill-mated Hickeys spawning and multiplying with hideous rapidity.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tiny Two

AT LENGTH his terror-bound eyes centered to the straight line of fire that was like a streak over his head, a sword slash across the sky, which had run the gamut of rainbow colors from red to hazy violet. Abruptly there sounded a sharp twang, and the violet shattered outward in cosmic spraying drops like a Fourth-of-July rocket bursting, and down on all sides came fiery meteors, which struck the floor and resolved into cooled, blackening globules.

Professor Hickey gasped. Before his very feet yawned a chasm, bottomless and unbelievable, and as he staggered over the very edge, he saw the straight-laced Mrs. Hickey faltering over the brim. Just as her knees buckled and she plunged for the depths, the abbreviated Professor Hickey acted impulsively, seized her waist, and dragged her back.

He deposited her in a heap on the queer corrugated terrain, feeling strangely and unspeakably gallant. Unbelievable though their adventure was—he had saved Mrs. Hickey's life, and it was in his right to feel justifiable pleasure in the feat. When he had seized his wife from the yawning maw, something had ripped, and as he stared down into the bewildered features of Mrs. Hickey he saw that her clothing was torn.

And, very oddly, she did not seem as straight-laced as before.

"John," cried Mrs. Hickey unbelievingly. "You—you saved my life." Then she seized for the gaps in her raiment, and the new Professor Hickey, who had been staring approvingly, wrenched his gaze away and grew crimson as he polished his glasses anew and cleared his throat.

"Never mind, Mrs.—Miss Moon," said Hickey restrainedly. "I'll call you Miss Moon, I suppose. Where we are I can only conjecture. I suppose that the mighty chasm over there is just a crack between floor boards, and that the matter vibrations of our bodies have been subdivided into numerous overtones by the oscillating ethereal current of the series of electromagnetic impulses. But I'll get you out of this some way and we may call our rather unsuccessful, er—experiment to an end."

"Ooooh!" wailed the more feminine Miss Moon, giving up in her battle with shredded nylon and now appealingly helpless. "How will we ever get out of here?"

"Not by crying and yelping!" retorted Professor Hickey masterfully, and inspired by a confidence her terror was instilling. "See all those other bodies lying about? They are our overtones. And it will last as long as that current is surging through the electromagnets on that table."

GAINING their feet, they peered across the corrugations formed by deep worn grains in the wood, and across an

expanse of oblong plateaus, divided at regular intervals by deep parallel crevices between the individual floor-boards, each now so monstrous in comparison to their new-found bodies. Piled here and there, helter-skelter and everywhere, were counterparts of their bodies, but each of them was now moveless. Everywhere they looked, the weird clumps of figures were in evidence, and of a number too vast to estimate.

"Those are part of our larger composite bodies," explained Professor Hickey, looking longingly at several of his nearer counterparts in the blue haze. "Luckily our ego, the spark of intelligence, or whatever it is, was indivisible, and thus only one of each of our tiny overtones knows sentient life."

After several worried moments, they found that each of the slumped bodies was alive and warm, with a slow pulse. Professor Hickey wiped perspiration from his brow and pointed to the black column of the table leg that soared so high in the blue haze that it was invisible at the upper heights.

"Our only chance," he said ruefully, "is that I can climb that and get to the switch. Apparently the alternating currents in the magnets are creating an etheric pulsation that will continue to alter the vibration of our bodies until it ceases to exist."

"But how are you going to jump the chasms?" demanded Miss Moon in dismay, for it was several floor-boards distance to the mastodonic table leg.

"Traverse the length of the board we're on, of course," explained Professor Hickey patiently. "Come along, if you're going with me, or if you want to, stay here. You might sit down and rest."

"Oh no," protested Miss Moon feelingly, springing to his side as he started off at a brisk walk. "You'll not leave me here. I'll be scared to death."

After long minutes of tiresome walk-

ing, they halted before the edge of a short cross precipice.

"Blast it!" muttered the scientist, doing a reluctant right-about-face. "I might have known the boards wouldn't be full length. We'll have to chance it the other way."

CHAPTER THREE

Arduous Journey

THE blue haze about them became thicker, and after retracing their steps and proceeding in an opposite direction, they discovered to their joy that there was a space in which the yawning chasms dwindled to cracks and ceased to be, where swelling joints and a thick padding of what to them was log-sized dust particles formed natural foot bridges over which they sprang easily.

Now certain that they were upon one of the boards that supported a table leg, they hurried forward into a gloom that was almost impenetrable. Professor Hickey was remembering that night would soon be falling upon the gigantic outside world. The janitor made a habit of sweeping the rooms in the early morning, and when that happened his unknowing clothopper feet would be certain to crush many of their counterparts. If that came to pass he was certain that the overtones would never be coerced to rejoin and create a unified whole. It gave him exactly twelve hours in which to effect a release by stopping those damnable electric pulsations that had raised such havoc with their beings.

"Well, here we are," he announced, coming to the black column that stretched far above them into the increasing darkness. His hands sought for rough creases made by wood-grains, and in a moment he knew that he would be able to pull himself hand-over-hand, like a human fly, clinging to the innumerable splinters and

gashes available to his diminutive hands. "You'll have to wait for me here."

"That's what you think!" remonstrated Miss Moon in a decided tone.

"You mean you're going to follow me?" demanded Professor Hickey in surprise.

"I'll be right on your coat tails," promised Miss Moon, looking around into the blue haze with a look of fear.

"That," said Professor Hickey stiffly, "will be quite up to you."

Saying this, and not daring to hesitate lest the terror of that which he contemplated seize him, he reached up, found niches, and began climbing slowly. Below him he glimpsed the intent features of Miss Moon, her arms moving with machinelike precision, her quivering face not daring to look below.

For the moment her plainness was transformed, and he rather regretted that he was so thoroughly beyond comparison with her favorite movie idol.

Then, as grasping, aching hands reached ever upward, seeking some sort of precarious hold, it occurred to Professor Hickey that his own attempt to save them might be looked upon by Miss Moon as an unselfish effort to restore her to a long and happy life in the monstrous outside world, and he felt better. It was just such an accomplishment as Clark Gable might have set out to do, and the mental comparison cheered him.

HIS hands were soon bleeding, and his feet began to burn from cramped positions in the ripped leather of his shoes. Always above and below was the blue abyss. For an interminable period he climbed upward. Once a splinter came away in his hand and he hung to it as his body swayed, but the fragment did not give. Luckily the table was very plain in construction, and the leg went straight upward, not being shelved over by a jutting top.

At last, tired but triumphant, he balanced on the smooth head of an upholstering tack and thrust himself out on a smooth plateau of oiled cloth that served to cover the table. Turning, he gave a hand to Miss Moon, and soon they were standing together, staring at a monstrous elongated sun that glared down at them over the great dark expanse. It took some little time to readjust his reasoning and decide that the solar orb was really the electric bulb hooked in series with the sonometer. After their eyes were used to the glare they could make out the plain uncovered socket below, as well as the towering electric switch nearby.

Rushing forward, he felt as the tiny men of Lilliput must have felt when they viewed Gulliver lying stretched on their shores. A terrible suspicion assailed him when he noted that his body was not even as wide as the thickness of the switch handle, but he thrust the thought from his mind as he raced past the long cylindrical structures which were the wound magnets, reached upward, braced his body, and pushed with all of his strength.

It would not give. The gigantic forks in which the copper lever was seated held it in an unshaking grasp. He bent over, applied his back to the knob. His muscles became rigid. Huge veins stood out in his face. Then something moved.

Simultaneously a scream from behind aroused him. He turned to see that Miss Moon was gaping with protuberant eyes at something in the distance, and that she seemed to be occupied in trying to stuff both hands into her gaping mouth.

At the same time a great reddish tentacle was thrust from beyond an outcropping of insulation about the bases of the electromagnets, to be followed by a great rust-hued head. Then monstrous insect-like legs propelled the apparition forward.

It was all very unbelievable. The mandibles of the giant ant whipped the air in eagerness. Great horn-covered eyes

centered their attention upon the two tiny people. Professor Hickey had seen too many ants under the microscope to mistake the newcomer.

Paralyzed by fear, he waited while the armor-plated monster edged forward inquiringly. Then as the wide-spread reddish legs sent it skittering toward them, Hickey released all holds and went skidding across the black oiled-cloth in a desperate dash for freedom.

Yet in that wild moment, something of chivalry remained, for he cut directly in front of Miss Moon, across the path of the charging insect, in an effort to attract attention and draw its pursuit.

He was far too slow, compared to the insect, which whirled off in a new direction without losing speed. It came racing down upon him with the momentum of an express train, dragging his kicking, plunging body from his feet and lifting it into mid-air between great mandibles.

HICKEY had never known such excruciating agony. The clawlike mandibles were crushing his ribs. The sharp points severed his coat to either side below his shoulder joints and cut through the flesh, coming to rest against the bones of his diaphragm. A hot poison flamed from the squeezed, broken points of pressure, pulsating through his blood stream to cover his body, until every inch of his being burned and throbbed. For an indeterminable length of time Professor Hickey fainted.

A rocking motion told him that his captor was on its way. His body was numb and detached now, a dead weight, and his mind was an aching thing that cried out against thinking. He only knew that the light rays were dwindling. Strangely enough the illumination from the giant bulb appeared to come from below. Then he saw the reason.

The ant was carrying him directly up the side of a wall, a partition between his

classroom and the biology hall in which Miss Moon had given lectures to reluctant students only a few hours before. It was all a trifle unreal. Ahead of them a conduit pipe loomed. As his captor climbed over a protuberance, Professor Hickey caught a glimpse of another insect following them, bearing the limp, unmoving body of what could be nothing else but Miss Moon.

Reaching the tubular sheathing that penetrated the wall, his captor calmly crawled into a crevice, made its way through an inky darkness in the wall, and emerged again into a deep purple gloom which Hickey knew was the biology room.

Now the way turned to left, along the broad ledge formed by a wainscoting. The right angle of the room's corner sent them off in a new direction, led along the broad top of a specimen case set against the wall, and then, strangely enough, the gloom began to lighten. Without warning a brilliance of light flooded down upon them.

Captor and captive were proceeding across the edge of an infinite chasm, brooded over by a giant scarlet orb that was sinking low. Though his perspective was immensely distorted by his tiny size, Professor Hickey presently recognized the

crimson disc as a setting sun, the abyss being that space directly below a second story window, intervening over the campus grounds. Although he had supposed that several hours might have lapsed since their departure into this Lilliputian existence, he saw now that it was not so, and that the sun was sending its final rays through the spruce trees at the further end of the football field.

There was a radiant warmth to the dying rays, a pleasant flooding of vital emanations that acted to arouse the stupefied atoms of his being. Terrifying though the spectacle was, he knew that the ant was merely carrying him across a window ledge. He felt like laughing and crying at the same time. An incredible thought had struck him.

But of course! These ants were from the little ant village which Miss Moon had insisted on keeping in a small flower box on the open ledge. On a tiny miniature island, surrounded by a moat of water, she had kept the insects imprisoned, or at least thought she was keeping them prisoners. Now it was obvious that there was a way to get across the moat. Professor Hickey squirmed as he laughed, and for a precious instant the giant manibles loosened their pressure.

Despite himself, a silly chuckle escaped his lips at sight of the ant village, now seeming immensely magnified and distorted, with its central cone of an island rising in stark silhouette against the sunset. As he squirmed and laughed his horn-rimmed spectacles slipped, dangling precariously from his nose, and the world blurred.

Quite by chance, the lenses of his glasses had concentrated tiny spots of light on the right jaw of the ant, and he could feel it trembling.

Raising his numbed hands with an effort, he held the glasses with their pin-points of light steady on the chitinous covering of the mandible.

Almost immediately Professor Hickey was released. He went tumbling head over heels and sat up in a crumpled heap. The world was blurred, and it seemed like aeons while he crawled about, found his spectacles, and managed to don them with tingling, awkward hands. He was just in time to see his erstwhile captor backing away uncertainly, while the ant bearing Miss Moon had now appeared along their backtrail. Professor Hickey was seized by a hysterical fear that sent him dashing for it, screaming with such headlong frenzy that it grew excited, dropped the dangling body from its mandibles, and also retreated to some distance away. There the insects held a council of war, rubbing their antennae together and apparently trying to decide what to do about this odd turn of events.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Deadly Pool

MISS MOON was dazed but unharmed, though her clothing had reverted to a weird sort of garment that might have done justice to a cave woman. He was able to judge however in a swift glance that Miss Moon, devoid of con-

stricting apparel, was by no means an unshapely woman. She swayed in his arms, sobbing and watching the ants from fearful apprehensive eyes to see what they would do next.

"Professor Hickey," she sobbed ungratefully and in no uncertain tone. "This is all your fault. And you know it."

It was like a spray of icy water for a person in Professor Hickey's moment of glowing. Forgetful of the threat constituted by the lurking insects, who might be converted into deadly machines of annihilation at any instant by a sudden offensive, the short physicist withdrew his hand from under the bare, scratched arm of his legal wife. At the instant he was on the verge of becoming a confirmed misogynist.

"They are your ants," he retorted vengefully, looking very offended. "If you'd keep them on their ant island where they belong this would never have happened, and we would have been back at the switch, figuring some way to open it and save our lives."

"My ants! I believe they are," returned Miss Moon in dismay, her thoughts diverted as she looked with new interest upon their monstrous insect opponents. "My, but they're strong and fat! And they'd be pretty if they weren't so big. I kept their moat filled with water. There is only one explanation. They must have tunneled through the sand below. But what are we going to do if they start after us again?"

"I don't know," replied Professor Hickey truthfully, watching the hovering insects. "They're puzzled now, but if we start to run, they'll probably be right after us. Isn't it true that ants don't work much after dark?"

"Of course it's true," returned Miss Moon hopefully.

"Then what we've got to do is to play hop-scotch with these red devils until dark, which won't be long," concluded Professor Hickey. "And there's one place better

than any other to do it. I'm thinking about the moat. Let's try moving slowly toward it, hoping not to precipitate an attack on their part."

Grasping his intent, she moved to his side and they began edging, not away from the great ants, but at an oblique angle toward the window-box and the ant village. Apparently their direction, more than their movements, mystified the insects, who crept slowly along after them, not increasing or decreasing their distance. But as the two tiny humans crawled over the window-box, the ants apparently regained part of their courage and began to overtake them.

Professor Hickey began to urge Miss Moon along a trifle faster, and the odd pursuit began to accelerate into a run. A low dirt ledge formed a short expanse under their feet. Above them the blue cone of the ant village reared mistily, a mighty cliff wall in which great grottos and yawning caverns told of a teeming inner life. In that mighty precipice were housed thousands of the great insects, who now might constitute a new and greater menace if they were discovered.

The dirt ledge disappeared abruptly beneath their feet. A gleam of water showed, mirrorlike and moveless. At the same time the huge red monsters from behind seemed to divine their intent, for there was a flash of crimson legs and both giant ants came charging at them.

Too late, however. Two bodies had arched out somewhat ungracefully, plummeted downward, and Professor Hickey found himself fighting depths of water with one hand over his nose. At length he gave that up, began to flounder with both arms, and managed to come to the surface, hoping against hope that they were out of reach of the mandibles.

HE WAS out of reach, well enough, floating some distance off shore. A pair of ant heads were peering defeatedly

over the high upper ledge, but Miss Moon, who had entered the water simultaneously, had not come up.

He began paddling around, forgetful of everything else, crying her name aloud, although he realized that it was almost impossible for her to hear. Then something cold lashed up from the water, settled around his neck, and began choking him and pulling him down.

Professor Hickey went down blubbering, kicking and fighting. He wanted desperately to get a single gasp of fresh air. One final wrench and he was free, although his arms were yet entwined about something smooth and oddly warm. With his lungs bursting, his temples throbbing, he opened his eyes and tried to penetrate the murky depths, just as something wavy brushed past his face and a cold visage with closed eyes drifted by.

It was Miss Moon. He had been struggling with her as she fought in drowning frenzy.

Remembering vaguely what to do with a drowning person, he seized one limp wrist, gave a tremendous kick as his feet touched bottom. Their bodies broke surface, and he saw that Miss Moon was unconscious. Professor Hickey forgot part of his troubles, and struck out wildly for the opposite shore, a circular expanse of huge painted boulders, and soon he had dragged Miss Moon into a niche below precipitous cliff walls. Darkness was falling swiftly, and as he laid her limp body on the brief skirt of sand, he was not certain whether life remained.

Her eyes opened in the dark, and she gasped. For a moment her bare arms went around him convulsively. Then she sat up and shoved him away. The water behind them had quieted, and the opposite walls were mirrored perfectly in the gleaming surface, as were the giant inverted heads of their puzzled pursuers.

As they shivered together, wet and cold, darkness came. Professor Hickey

remembered enviously how it would appear on the outer campus grounds. Long shadows from the gymnasium would have been creeping across the lawn for hours, crawling up the sides of the administration buildings, and then suddenly, abruptly, the shadows had engulfed the window-box. That meant quick blackness in the ant village. And it meant that their allotted span of life on this terrifying world of littleness had been lengthened, though perhaps only for a short while. With the darkness came an icy chilliness that went right through their wet clothes to their very bones.

"We'll wait for an hour," decided Professor Hickey, trying to pierce the sooty darkness. "Then we'll take a chance that the ants have given up and crawled back into their holes. We've got to take that chance because we've got to get back to the sonometer before morning and stop its damnable broadcasting of sub-Hertzian waves. We'll swim and try to retrace our steps."

"In the dark?" demanded Lydia Moon with a voice that quavered at the mere thought of creeping along the wainscoting ledge in the stygian black.

"In the dark," returned Professor Hickey decisively. He knew that there was no other way out.

CHAPTER FIVE

As the World Slept

PROFESSOR HICKEY had a wild notion that they were swimming around in circles through the unseen waters. Then his toes struck a submerged rock and he wanted to scream from the pain. A moment later they were wading waist-deep in water and feeling their way along the perpendicular walls for a crevice.

After venturing toward the right for some distance, a gorge opened in the sea

wall and they climbed black tortuous walls so slowly that hours seemed to pass before their ascent was over. Once again on the black edge of the window-box, they clung together, feeling that a giant insect might leap out of the dark upon them at any moment.

The trip back along the window ledge was something Professor Hickey never wanted to remember. Finally he bumped into the sill, found the ledge leading along the wainscoting, and went along hugging the wall. As they ventured across the comparatively wider surface of the specimen case, he noticed that Miss Moon was trembling with the same icy cold that was numbing his own body, and that she was tiring. Once she stumbled, and he thought she had fallen over the ledge.

Then he heard her sobbing.

"C-can't we rest?" she begged. "Just for a little while?"

"No," retorted Professor Hickey fearfully. "Keep walking. It's getting colder all the time and we've got to keep circulation going. If we don't there's a danger of freezing to death."

He helped Miss Moon to her feet and for some time afterward she made no protest, although her strength was waning and her footsteps began to lag. Professor Hickey got hold of one of her arms and helped her along. There was not much left of his clothing, and what there was of it was hanging in shreds. The mere thought of descending the further side of the precipitous wall, even when penetrated, sent tremors up and down his spine, and he forced it from his mind as they staggered onward.

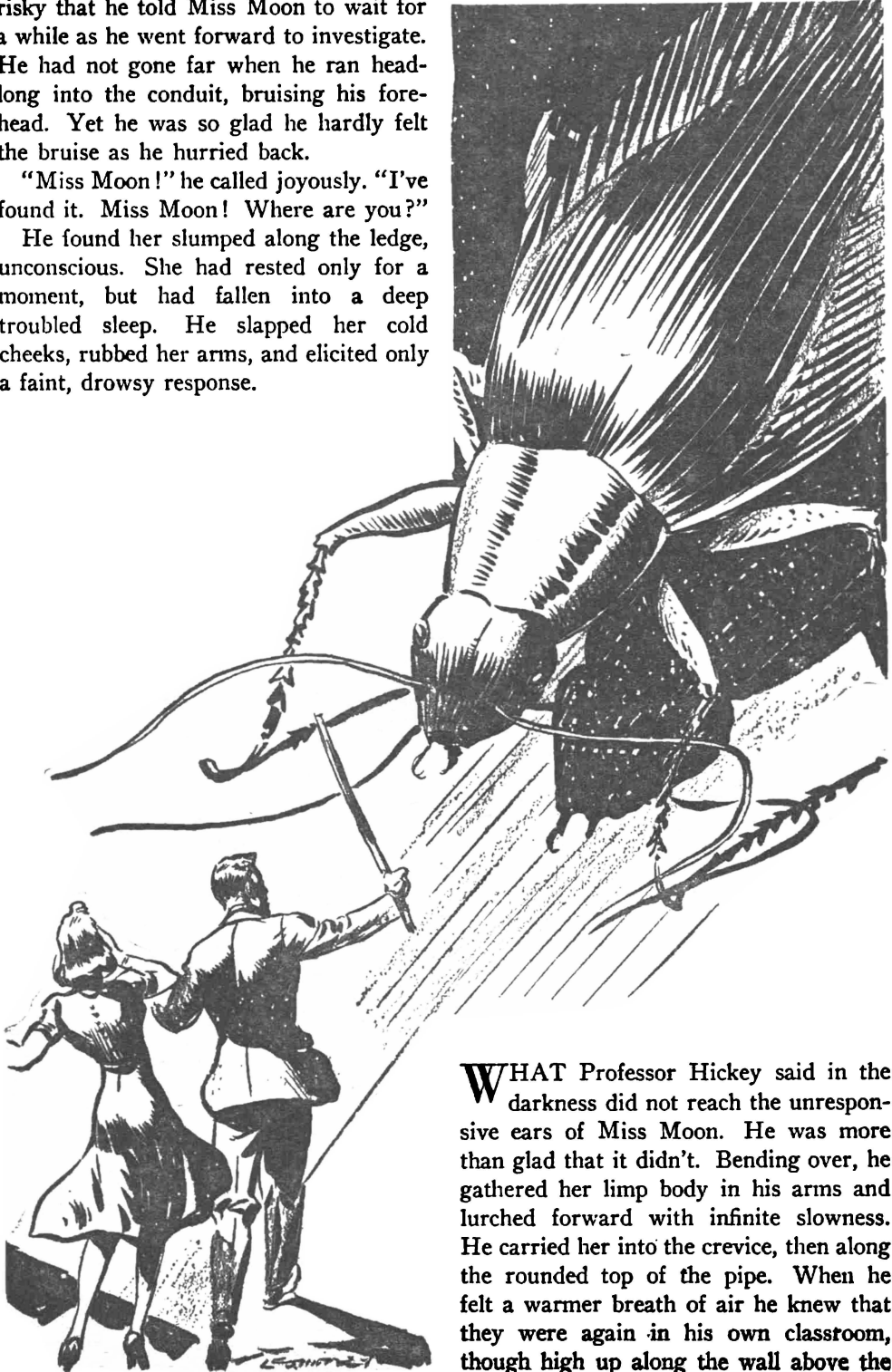
How many hours were passing, he didn't know. He began to fear that they had passed the conduit in the darkness and were lost.

For some unaccountable reason the ledge was narrowing to a mere strip, and Professor Hickey could not remember having come that way. The footing got so

risky that he told Miss Moon to wait for a while as he went forward to investigate. He had not gone far when he ran headlong into the conduit, bruising his forehead. Yet he was so glad he hardly felt the bruise as he hurried back.

"Miss Moon!" he called joyously. "I've found it. Miss Moon! Where are you?"

He found her slumped along the ledge, unconscious. She had rested only for a moment, but had fallen into a deep troubled sleep. He slapped her cold cheeks, rubbed her arms, and elicited only a faint, drowsy response.



WHAT Professor Hickey said in the darkness did not reach the unresponsive ears of Miss Moon. He was more than glad that it didn't. Bending over, he gathered her limp body in his arms and lurched forward with infinite slowness. He carried her into the crevice, then along the rounded top of the pipe. When he felt a warmer breath of air he knew that they were again in his own classroom, though high up along the wall above the

laboratory. It was much warmer now, and he laid his sleeping burden down.

By peering over the edge he could make out the electric light bulb, still glowing in the gloom below. Beyond it was the sonometer, with its formidable array of electromagnets, which even now were sending out strange ultra-radio waves in spherical pulsations. By looking closely he could see the numerous tiny slumped bodies on the floor. Now they gave the appearance of lifelessness, yet he knew that they were living overtones of their own bodies.

And he saw something else, did Professor Hickey. As if the night's adventure were not enough, he saw something enormous and threatening, a prehistoric thing of unbelievable ugliness, creeping around the bare terminals of the incandescent bulb. The monstrosity was peering over the edge of the table, glaring with gigantic, greedy orbs at the scattered bodies lying on the floor of the classroom.

Even as he watched it walked along the edge of the table on its many legs, then paced back again. It did this several times. Professor Hickey stood on the upper ledge, a strange, half-naked apparition in rage, his scratched knees knocking together. The monster that looked so huge was a cockroach, and it was apparently contemplating a means by which it could get down to the moveless shapes on the floor. Once there, it might devour several of them, and by so doing, destroy the vibrational harmony by which the tinier pulsations might once more unite into a whole. And if it kept staggering on the edge of the table, it would presently lose its footing and fall to the floor, which would of course answer the purpose as a means of transit.

Professor Hickey had never thought nor acted so quickly in his entire life. Perhaps it had become apparent that it was useless to attempt to analyze the situation. He would have to accept it for

what it was and do something about it. And that is exactly what happened. He managed to awaken Miss Moon by shaking her savagely, pointed to the monstrous creature on the table below, and indicated something which had only shortly before caught his attention for the first time. It was the extension cord from a light socket, dangling down the wall toward the table where it was feeding electricity into the light bulb.

Springing outward, Professor Hickey wrapped arms and legs about the extension cord, turned his eyes deliberately from the sickening depths, and loosened his hold. He began to slide downward rapidly.

Once started it was impossible to stop his wild descent. It was all he could do to hang on, and as the cord looped out toward the horizontal, bending his path in a swooping curve, another force was added to that of his weight, trying to wrench his arms loose.

Then it was over, and he was sent skittering along the oiled-cloth table top, his legs pumping like pistons to keep him from falling. When he managed a gasping stop he was attracted by the renewed swaying of the dangling cord, and a strange sight met his eyes.

For Miss Moon had refused to be left alone, and had followed his pathway; she was coming down the cord, tattered skirt flying, her eyes widened with fear and set upon Professor Hickey with an odd sort of supreme determination.

CHAPTER SIX

The Monster Roach

SHE was catapulted out and down, directly at him, and they both went down in a sprawl. Directly over them loomed a black ugly thing that was like some diabolical creation lured from a nightmare. The only thing moving was its black seg-

mented antennae, yet there was that in its attitude which revealed that it was crouched, watching them.

The entity that sat watching them was like a prehistoric monster from some long-dead era of the past. It *was* a prehistoric monster! Professor Hickey was enough of a scientist to realize that the history of cockroaches, and evidences of their remains, go back as far as the days of cave men and even back to the age of the giant lizards. These hated insects are remarkably adaptive, and have persisted in much the same form as century after century goes by. Now its bloated, black body was moving up and down, trembling with anticipation. In another instant it was flinging itself upon them.

Professor Hickey rolled over and in a single motion gained his feet, dragging Miss Moon with him. The slashing ebony-hued jaws came down at them, whisked closely by. Those inky scimitars had barely missed them as they raced around the end of the row of electromagnets, seeking refuge. It was Hickey's thought to escape by throwing themselves into a crevice so small that the ponderous body of the roach could not follow. But they raced along the series of giant cylindrical coils, and found no such crevice.

In the shadows behind the magnets they managed to lose the monster for a moment, and stood flattened against a rounded wall, watching it blunder around in the gloom. It became obvious as it neared that it would be certain to discover them eventually. Professor Hickey looked about for a weapon and his eyes lighted as he saw a loose end of coil wire jutting from one of the magnets. It was a length as long as his own body. If he could break it off at the terminal, it might serve as a club.

Seizing the end of wire in his arms he tugged, and a thrill of hope went up in his heart. He could bend it, though it took every exertion.

"Miss Moon," he cried. "Can't you help? If we bend it back and forth we may be able to break it."

It was a thrilling moment. Side by side the half-naked little human beings tugged at the copper wire, pulling it one way as far as it would go, then pushing it around the other way. Each moment the black hulk of the seeking monster loomed more gigantic and discernible against the outer gloom.

As though to add to their troubles, the outer gloom was beginning to lessen a bit, with that warning glow which tells of a night almost gone and a morning that is near. The monster was almost upon them when the wire broke at the terminal and Professor Hickey felt a new strength flowing into his veins as he hefted the strange weapon.

He had been none too soon. Apparently guided by smell, the huge cockroach came in at him, its huge eyes glittering fiendishly like green living jewels.

Tensing his muscles, Professor Hickey swung his metal club back as far as it would go, put every ounce of weight into the swing, and let fly. Giant mandibles lowered and closed like forceps. His club struck the black horny snag of a mandible, and the shock of it sent him reeling. In an instant he saw that no great harm had come to the loathsome insect, even though his blow had landed solidly.

YET he had diverted the attack, and as it came in viciously again, he swung a second time, aiming at the nearest leg. This time he had the savage pleasure of seeing the 'roach's leg crumble up at the point of impact and break away from the towering black body. But this served only to anger the giant attacker, and it lurched toward them again.

"Run for it," shouted Hickey in dismay, glancing back warningly at Miss Moon. "We've got one last chance. Run out toward the electric lamp bulb."

Miss Moon had been obeying Professor Hickey unquestioningly for the past few hectic moments, and he was not surprised in the least to see her obey instantly. Lugging his metal club, he raced at her heels, hoping to find use for it as a last resort.

Circling from the shadows of the electromagnets, they felt the warmth of the incandescent bulb, towering from above. It increased, as they ran, to an almost unbearable intensity. Past the great bulb he began to make out other objects in the highflung spaces of the physics room. A great oblong of light was glowing with the blue flush of dawn. Morning was upon the outer world.

The central loop of incandescence in the light globe was like a snaky sun to these tiny midgets, racing along the table top, sending out a stream of heat that beat down upon their exposed limbs. The bare white crockery of its base loomed pyramid-like, somewhat taller than the little professor where the huge glass bulb was screwed in. Lower down, he saw where the extension cord parted, forking into two naked copper wires. The copper terminals reflected reddish rays into their eyes, almost blinding them with brilliance and heat.

They leaped over the cord and at a word from the professor, halted. Here he would make the last stand.

And there was a chance, just a chance, that the heat would drive their pursuer away.

Even as they hoped, the great sprawling insect was slowing down, progressing crookedly due to its crippled leg, but the antennae branched out, shuddered to a tautness that revealed it had discovered them, and it came lumbering forward, crawling across the forked extension wire.

With one lightning move, Professor Hickey wheeled, thrust the woman backward in a flying heap. Turning to confront the diabolical ebon monster, he

picked up his metal club, but did not swing it. Instead, he balanced one end on a bare terminal of the light cord and tilted the other so its fall would bring it into contact with the wire of the opposite charge.

Holding his body rigid, he waited until the jet-black head was almost upon him, eyes glittering like fire, mandibles slashing with crazed eagerness. Then he released his hold on the club and kicked back on his heels.

The enormous thing that crawled toward him was wading one moment across bare copper wires, and the next—

The giant incandescent bulb flickered. Sparks flew from the bare wires, danced along the metal club, which grew red-hot, then turned white and dripping. Over the club, the dark body of the insect shuddered to a halt. Wisps of smoke began to rise. The light grew dimmer, it squirmed spasmodically in its death throes.

AND out of the distant dawn came a strange sound, like the twanging of lyres, to be followed by deeper, more resonant sounds, booming up the octaves into a deep, rumbling bass tone. There followed a sound like the striking of a huge gong, and then only silence remained.

A ray of sunlight had transformed the gloom now, a warm golden ray, emerging from a shining oblong. Professor Hickey moved his head slightly, and saw that the stream of light was coming in from the east window of the physics room where the earliest rays of sunrise struck.

He gasped, not daring to believe what he saw, or hope that it was true. The golden glow was falling upon the recumbent body of a woman of normal size who lay on the floor. He blinked his eyes, removed his glasses and polished them, and then looked again. Yes, it was Miss Moon all right, although her clothing had gone through a strange metamorphosis, and she

rather resembled some naiad stepping from dawning sunbeams in some forest glade. Of course he was thinking in mythological terms, but the comparison did seem to be apt.

Or perhaps it was his frame of mind. Professor Hickey liked to try to analyze his feelings and emotions as much as one might make a scientific test of some curious new substance or compound. But he was a genial little man and did not worry a great deal about abstract objects or emotions. He was content to seek what he could, then accept things for what they were on the surface.

After prowling around through the basement corridors, he managed to find two pairs of soiled but usable janitor's overalls, in which he and Miss Moon were presently attired.

"From one angle," she said, looking at the abbreviated Professor Hickey with admiration and a trace of moisture in her

eyes, "the experiment was a success."

He nodded gravely. "One that must never be repeated," he told her. "I'll see to that. And also the other, Miss—er—Moon. It's rather hard to explain, but I've grown to dislike the sound of that word. You see, regardless of our pretenses or of how we may feel, it is an incorrect name."

"You mean—I should be Mrs. Hickey?"

Professor Hickey nodded. When he tried the electric lights he found that a fuse had blown, but the sun was streaming through the window and in the fresh solar glow Mrs. Hickey had beautiful hair. There were many pretty little gleams, rather like silver ripples. He had told her about it once before, and for some time had not felt impelled to recall the fact. Yet at the first opportunity Professor Hickey intended to remind her of it and start in just where that left off.

THE END