

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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# the spectacles

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

**In that chill, sunless future Man was a relic under glass. But a museum must have its guardians.**

IT WAS A most delightful day, with a crisp autumn tang in the air and Willie felt a joyful lift throughout his entire being. It was forbidden, of course, and he had no right at all to even enter the hall and go romping over its mottled flagstones toward the case and the spectacles. But he simply didn't care.

"Oh, happy me!" he thought. "Oh, joyous day! What do I care if I am caught and punished?"

He was very little and the case was enormous and it glittered in the sunlight from a picture-window that overlooked a many-splendored bay. Beyond the window gulls dipped and wheeled and far in the distance a black buoy rolled with the sea's resistless surge.

It was easy enough to climb into the case and emerge with the spectacles. The glass was shattered over half its length, and the pale mummified brow upon which the spectacles reposed could offer no resistance. Not even the mysterious emanations of thought which had once issued from it could daunt in retrospect so small a thief on such a day as this.

"Oh, glorious, carefree, wonderful me!" intoned Willie.

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*Frank Belknap Long assures us that this tiny tale was written without the aid of prophetic spectacles or visual props of any kind. You may believe him if you wish. Frankly, we're skeptical. How could we fail to be when we once observed Mr. Long slyly concealing a pair of spectacles quite magically aglow!*

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Into the case he crawled and out of it he strode triumphant, with the spectacles perched on the bridge of his gladsomely vibrating nose.

"Where will I sit?" he asked himself, looking up first at the sky above, and then down with a pensive wink at the waters which covered the earth.

"Right here by the window. Why not? Big dreams, wonderful dreams, must have room to stretch their limbs and go striding over land and sea like giants in search of their lady loves."

Willie sat down, crossed his small legs and looked out through the spectacles at the sea and the sky.

Almost immediately a ship came into view. It was a very large ship and passengers thronged the rails and white handkerchiefs fluttered in the breeze, and there was a great shouting from the decks and a rejoicing that could not possibly have existed at all if Willie had not been sitting there to take part in it.

"Hello, Willie!" came in a rising chorus. "Isn't it a glorious day? We're heading straight into the sunrise, Willie. Believe it or not, there are palm-fringed islands out there just begging to be explored, and brown-skinned women who would die immediately if no one ever came to make love to them.

"Think of it, Willie. This big round Earth is ours to enjoy for ever and ever."

"I know," said Willie, and waved back. Or rather, he shouted it. "I understand! You don't have

to tell me! I know what it means to be a man, and young and in love. I even know what you're thinking. The women you are holding in your arms wouldn't seem half so wonderful if you couldn't dream of brown-skinned girls too—women you'll never really meet, women who don't even exist."

"Sure, Willie, sure—that's it. But how did you know? How did you even guess? You're just a—"

"Willie, put those spectacles down this minute!" a familiar voice interrupted. "Take them off and give them to me. I'll put them back, and then we'll both have to be very humble, and hope that destruction won't come upon us. You've done a terrible thing, Willie. It's worse than a crime. It's—"

Willie jumped up and took the spectacles off, and gave them to the mother-model. She stood towering over him, sternly severe and reproving, her seven-foot android robot bulk blotting out the sunlight at her back.

"We were made to obey Man—not to try to understand him!" she said.

"But he is gone forever now. He will never return."

"It doesn't matter. We were made to obey."

Willie looked at the mummified figure in the case and his small conical head drooped in resignation. The autumn sky seemed suddenly gray and forbidding and the waters which covered the Earth had become a leaden expanse of emptiness.