

**A Five-Minute Tale
of Supernatural Adventure**

THE THING

By FRANK MARION PALMER

IT IS easy to recall it, bit by bit, just as it occurred, though it should have been forgotten long ago.

I can, even now, visualize the **THING** as I saw it in all its frightfulness. Time has accentuated the memory of that haunting half hour.

The immediate result of my enervating experience was a benumbing of the senses—a partial paralysis of the mind. The frenzied fear, the gripping horror of it, came to me later when miles away from the scenes of its occurrence.

I had retired late. My room, number 307, was on the third floor of a downtown hotel, which town and which hotel, for good and sufficient reasons, I shall not say. Several cups of strong coffee had rendered sleep out of the question. The weather was warm, but a damp, sticky, smoke-laden breeze, due to the crowded shipping that lay in the harbor below, penetrated everywhere. I fancy the night was dark, but the electric glare of the city turned night into day.

At last, lulled by the stillness within and the hum of the city which came to me through my open window, I slept. My sleep was a dreamless, leaden unconsciousness, far from refreshing. Then came the introduction to my unusual experience.

I could never explain why I heard it so distinctly. Soundly asleep, my ears were painfully smitten by a dull, heavy, sickening, smothered explosion.

I was awake and alert in an instant, trying to account for it. Light of day was paling the electric glare and objects were plainly visible within the room. Without my open window I could see, through the blue murk, the outlines of buildings across the street, the serrated sky-line far above. I got up, stretched and yawned; took a turn around the room, lit a cigarette and laid down again. I had not accounted for the noise, but finally concluded that it came from some natural cause—apparently out on the street. At any rate, I thought no more of it as I lay there enjoying my morning smoke.

I was about to doze again when the room was suddenly filled, saturated with

the vilest smell of burned powder I have ever encountered. It was absolutely sickening and seemed mingled with the smell of burning human flesh—the stench that hangs over a battlefield the morning after a carnage.

So, I said to myself, that explosion was in this building, on the third floor and not far from my room!

I was still reclining and had taken another cigarette when the **THING** came into my room, putting an end to all thought of immediate investigation.

It came in through the wide open window from the fire-escape. Its shape was that of a human body, entirely nude, perfectly distinct in outline and detail, yet lacking in the extremities—a torso only—so distinct and lifelike that I could see the folds of flesh, the contour of muscles, the pinky-yellow color of the skin, and yet, so transparent was it, the window casing, the figured wall paper, the outlines of the dresser and everything it passed, were visible *through* it—as plainly discernible as though it were not there.

It floated in—slowly, slowly, as a mist of early morning might enter one's chamber or a wisp of smoke, wafted in on a stray breeze—unsubstantial, filmy, yet *seeming* to have the substance of flesh and blood.

The head of my bed was exactly opposite the window, and I had splendid vantage for contemplation. I was not long in discovering the incompleteness of that spectral visitor. It lacked hands and forearms, the lower extremities were cut off above the knees, and, to complete the phantasmal horror of it, there was no head upon those broad, powerful shoulders—only the stump of a muscular neck.

The awfulness of this armless, legless, headless shape was further intensified by the fact that the extremity of each truncated member seemed to drip red blood!

All this I saw as it floated into my room through the open window—a ghastly shape that defied description—while I was breathing the stench of a day-old battlefield.

And now, the last, the most weird detail of all—the most inexplicable—the one that indeed filled me with astonishment was yet to come.

Between my open window and the door, against the wall, stood a dresser surmounted by a large plate glass mirror.

As the **THING** advanced, floated through my room, to melt, vanish, or draw through the solid panels of my door, it, perforce, must pass by this mirror. So clear was my mind in those trying moments, that I had dwelt upon this very fact as the **THING** advanced, and had speculated as to what the reflection of a spectre would be like.

Let science explain this singular phenomenon; I can not. The reflection of my spectre was no spectre, at all! It was the solid, substantial, flesh, blood and bone of a six-foot man about thirty years of age, not lacking a single member, perfect in color, form, feature, as nude as the day he was born, gracefully floating by the big looking glass; his eyes closed, a contented smile lighting up his handsome features—much like one asleep whose face is transfigured by a pleasant dream.

And then, just as the figure was floating free of the glass—as the level on the edge of the plate began to distort the otherwise perfect lineaments, the head was turned by some odd movement of the body, the eyes opened and looked straight into mine!

With a start, I half arose and called out:

“Arnold! Oh, Arnold, is it, *can* it be. . . .”

Even as I called—foolishly, idiotically, pleadingly—in a hollow, unnatural voice, I knew there would be, *could* be no response. For an instant, fear—fear that he *might* heed my cry—that he *might* delay his noiseless flight through my room, gripped my throat and stilled my voice.

But now the apparition *out* of the glass, was at the door. Through it I could plainly see the outlines of the door casing—and it was becoming less and less. It was gone. The phantom drew *through*

the locked and bolted door as vapor through the meshes of a sieve.

Such was the THING that visited me in my room on the morning of September 2.

As soon as it was gone my feet touched the floor. I unlocked the door and went into the hall. All was quiet out there. I heard no sound, smelled no burning powder. If there were guests in the other rooms they all must have been sound asleep. One could have heard a mouse creep in that gloomy hallway. I closed the door and got into bed. When I awoke again the clanging jar of the street traffic told me it was late.

I bathed, shaved and dressed. As I walked down the hall and took the elevator to the office I scanned the faces of the late risers. There was no look of surprise, curiosity—consternation, on a single set of features. All was as commonplace as upon any other morning. Nothing unusual had happened.

And such was the effect of those passing and re-passing guests that my harrowing experience of the early morning began to seem unreal and all but passed, for the time, out of my memory. At the office I paid my bill, listened to the commonplace talk of a garrulous clerk and went away, without having mentioned a word of my experience.

On the stage, homeward bound, a chat with a seat mate and the beauty of Autumn foliage painting the borders of the highway red, brown and yellow, occupied my attention. But when I ar-

rived at Maple Shadows I was silent no longer.

I horrified my wife and daughter until they ran away from me. Then I followed them up.

"But Arnold Mathews was killed at Chateau Thierry. You told me so," said my daughter.

"He was! I saw him killed with my own eyes. His legs, arms and head blown into bits by an exploding bomb dropped from the air. Not a shred of his clothing remained—"

"And this one—Ugh! do go away! You make me shudder. Oh, dad, how awful!"

From the sheer lack of an audience I desisted.

"Watch the papers tonight and tomorrow," I ventured again at the dinner table. "A man committed suicide this morning at the Savoy Hotel. *How* he did it I am not quite prepared to say, but I should think, that, owing to the character of the explosion and the appearance of the THING after. . . ."

My wife stopped me with a gesture of disgust.

"George, that is not a nice subject for the dinner table."

"Well," I reiterated, unwilling to be squeaked so suddenly, "he killed himself, just the same, in a room across the hall from mine. . . You'll see. Watch the papers."

And this is what we read in the evening paper:

"SUICIDE AT SAVOY HOTEL

"Arnold Mathews, a guest at the Savoy Hotel, occupying room 308, committed suicide last night or early this morning. "About the middle of the afternoon, when it was found that the man would not respond to repeated knocking and that the door was locked from the inside, the room was broken into. A gruesome sight met the eyes of the landlord, clerks and officers of the law.

"On the bed, in a sitting position, braced against the footboard and swathed in all the blankets the room contained, was found the dead body of Mathews. Thorough examination of the mutilated body together with bits of evidence found on the bed and elsewhere in the room, led those present to believe that the deceased had attached a piece of fuse to a large dynamite cap, placed the cap in his mouth, raised his feet and legs from the floor, then, covering himself completely with blankets, sheets, pillows and his own clothing, (the man was entirely naked), lighted the fuse and, deliberately folding his arms, calmly awaited the end.

"The bed, floor, walls and ceiling were bespattered with blood. The body was a ghastly sight. Nothing but the trunk was left to indicate that the remains had once been a human being. Arnold Mathews was about 28 years of age, six feet in height, light complexion, brown hair and eyes. He was a stranger in the city, and an effort is being made to locate some friend or relative. The motive is still unknown.

"No one has as yet been found who heard the sound of the explosion. This is not strange, as the entire third floor with the exception of two rooms—Mathews' room and the one opposite—was unoccupied.

"The officers are trying to locate one G. R. Lawton, an ex-army surgeon, the man who slept in number 307, the room opposite the one occupied by Arnold Mathews last night."

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