

m a g a z i n e o f  
**HORROR**

**The Bizarre and The Unusual**

*Volume 3*

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*Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor*

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# The Thing In The House

by H. F. Scotten

If the response from you, the readers, follows the pattern that seems to have been set up thus far, some of you will insist that this is science fiction. We would call it borderline material, not quite science fiction, not quite weird in the "supernatural" sense — very much like the sort of tale that appeared in the old Munsey magazines and in some of the early issues of AMAZING STORIES and ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE, to which various readers objected on the grounds that it was not really science-fiction! We do feel, however, that it belongs in MOH. About the author, we can tell you nothing except that this is one of two stories he had published back in 1929 and 1930.

"LISTEN!" I caught at the chief's arm. Faintly, but unmistakably, across the field came the terror-laden scream of a man. The chief tensed to listen, then reached over and touched the driver of the big police car on the shoulder. The chauffeur cautiously applied the brakes; we skidded slightly, and stopped.

Peering through the driving rain, we strained our eyes across the snow-covered field at the left of the lonely country road. Presently we discerned a dark figure, running, stumbling through the slush. He scrambled over the rail fence a little ahead of us, and started down the road, his flying, frightened form

plainly illuminated by our glaring headlights. He slipped, fell, then lay inert.

In a moment we were beside him, and lifted him into the car, where he sagged down on the rear seat, breathing heavily. Indistinct words tumbled from his lips; then plainly came: "Chief! — *The Thing! — Murdered!* — Don't let it . . ." The man groaned, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Chief Mandell, startled at the delirious mention of his own title, hastily wiped the mud and water from the man's face, while I held a flashlight. Surprised recognition forced the exclamation, "Frankie the Frown!" Then, to me: "Doctor, this man is a notorious thief. Sounds as though he has information of importance to us. Any chance of his reviving soon?"

I made a hasty examination, and suggested, "We had better get him to my office as quickly as possible, Chief. I am afraid he will need careful attention."

Turning to the chauffeur, the chief said quietly, "All right, Jim," and the car leapt forward toward the city through the pelting rain.

My relations with the police, and particularly the detective department, of which Chief Mandell was the efficient head, back in 192-, had held for me a constantly increasing interest. I practised medicine, when I could not avoid that uninteresting

phase of my activities, but for the past year had been applying my knowledge of psychology, metaphysics, and various other sciences, to the identifying and apprehending of criminals.

My success in this field, which, no doubt, was the direct result of the fascination it held for me, had fostered a lasting friendship between Chief Richard Mandell and me — a friendship which needed not the discomforts of night calls or disagreeable work. We had been returning from an attempt to identify a suspect held in a neighboring city, when the bedraggled and hysterical criminal known to the police as Frankie the Frown entered my experiences. In the car with us, beside the officer driving, was McDonald, as likable and intelligent a reporter as ever wielded a pencil. He was favored above all others by the chief, and few indeed were the investigations in which he did not assist us.

ARRIVING AT MY office, we removed the still unconscious Frankie from the car and laid him on a couch in the warm room. I set to work with stimulants and restoratives, after removing part of his wet clothing. He had been without hat or overcoat, and was chilled through and through.

I was gratified, before long, to see indications of returning consciousness in the man. Present-

ly his eyes opened, stared vacantly at us; then he weakly attempted to arise. I helped him to sit up. His puzzled gaze rested for a moment on Mandell; then recognition dawned in his look. He sprang to his feet, and clutched at the chief's sleeve.

"Chief! You?" he cried. "The *Thing!* Did you kill it, Chief? Where is it?"

The chief forced him back on the couch. "Take it easy now, Frankie," he said. "That's better. Now tell us all about it."

Full memory, with all its horrors, then returned to him. "For God's sake, Chief, come quick; don't let it get away. It has killed the professor. I didn't do it, Chief, honest I didn't. It was the *Thing*. The professor made it, and now . . ."

"Wait a minute, Frankie; tell it straight now," the chief broke in. "What professor got killed, and where was it?"

"Professor Huneberg, Chief; and Dr. Rickston is dead, too, but he died from the shock. It was at The Pines, where we lived."

I involuntarily exclaimed aloud at this startling statement. I knew these men.

"WHERE we lived?" the chief exclaimed. "What were you doing there?"

"I worked for them, Chief, ever since I got out of jail."

"What is this *Thing*, as you call it?"

"Some kind of an animal. The professor made it."

"The professor *made* it?"

"Yes, he created it, but you . . ."

"Where is it now, running around loose?"

"I don't know. If it broke out of the laboratory it is probably still somewhere in the house, if it still exists. Chief, for God's sake, get out there quick! If it gets loose . . ."

Frankie showed signs of becoming hysterical.

"All right, Frankie," the chief said soothingly, "we'll go right out. Doctor, can you fix him up? We will have to take him along. Sounds like a rush order to me."

My office adjoined my living-quarters, so I procured dry shoes, a cap, and an overcoat for Frankie. His socks and coat had been drying on the radiator, and would serve. While Mac and the officer with us helped him into them, I turned to Mandell and said:

"Chief, I knew this Professor Huneberg and Dr. Rickston. They were old acquaintances of mine. Very able scientists, they were, and engaged in biological and chemical research. I had lost track of them since they retired to experiment privately. The professor was noted for his remarkable success in his chosen work. He, I have no doubt, has been experimenting with various animals in the developing and grafting of tissue, and has

probably developed a hybrid with savage tendencies, that got beyond control. I advise you to take ample precautions in attempting to subdue it."

"All right. We'll stop at the station and get a few riot guns. They ought to be precaution enough."

IN A SHORT time, the police car was again roaring through the night. We had stopped and obtained guns for all of us, except Frankie. Two patrolmen had been added to the passenger list, and we presented a formidable appearance.

Frankie told of his relations with the victims of the Thing we were racing to destroy.

"Chief, it was awful," he began, and continued, rather disconnectedly: "The professor didn't mean for us to see it kill him, but the blind rolled up and . . ."

We waited. He covered his face with shaking hands. In a moment he went on:

"The doctor fell. I think his heart failed. I ran to my room in the back part of the house and locked myself in. I've been there since day before yesterday. I was afraid to leave and afraid to stay. I felt like a hunted animal driven into a hole, with something about to come in after me. The picture of the professor being — being killed kept coming before my eyes.

"The Thing was so powerful

I was afraid it would break out of the laboratory and escape from the house. I pictured it roaming around the country — killing, tearing, destroying. Little children, women, strong men; all helpless, and no one to know what did it! God! I tried to force myself to go back into the laboratory to reassure myself that the Thing was gone, as the professor said it would be, but I couldn't."

We let Frankie ramble on, for a while, with his disconnected recital. Handicapped by rain, slush, and slow-moving traffic, it would take us twenty minutes or more to reach The Pines, which was a few miles from the city limits on one of the lesser arterial highways. From it he had fled across more than a mile of dark, rain-lashed country to the point where we found him.

"After a few hours," Frankie continued, "I became calmer. I tried to think, to reason things out. I began to feel foolish to think I had doubted the professor's word. He was a smart man; he must have been right about the Thing. It was surely gone.

"I knew that if I left and ran away, it would only be a question of time until the bodies were discovered. I knew you would find that I had been living in the house. Because of my record, you would think that I had killed the doctor and the

professor, if there was no trace of the Thing. The evidence was all against me. I decided to write to you, Chief, and explain it all, so you could bring men and destroy the monster if it should still be in existence. I didn't want to take a chance on that, even though I was about convinced you would find no trace of it, for there would be no peace, no sanity for me or anyone should it happen to be there. I was going to leave this evening, after dark, and mail the letter to you from some other town. I've got it in my pocket. Here . . ."

With shaking fingers, he tried to unfasten the overcoat, but fumbled futilely at the buttons.

"Never mind, Frankie," the chief said; "you can give it to us when we get back."

"Well, anyway, in my letter I told you all about it," Frankie continued, "all about the professor's experiment, and how it killed him; but this evening, after dark, my lamp bulb burned out just as I was finishing. When I was left in the dark I went crazy with fear. I imagined the Thing was about to grab me. Again I was sure it was still in existence. I stuffed the letter in my pocket and ran from the house. I remembered what the professor said about the imagination and I . . ."

"Wait a minute, Frankie," the chief broke in; "you are getting all excited again, and we are

not getting the information we need." And to direct his mind into smoother channels, he said, "Tell us about when you went to work for the professor."

I gave Frankie a drink of brandy. His nerves quieting, he again began to talk, interrupted now and then by the screech of the siren as the car tore through the wet blackness. He told us, briefly, the history of his life. He had been born in the slums. Cuffed and beaten by a drunken mother who was ignorant of the identity of his father, he grew up in an environment that molded his criminal career. Undersized, he was bullied by other boys. He learned to hate and distrust everyone. He played a lone hand always. God knows how he survived a childhood so bitter that his face had never relaxed in a smile. He earned thus the only name he had ever known, "Frankie the Frown".

During the war, into which the draft had forcibly plunged him, his bitter sufferings and privations had produced the only longing for human sympathy and comradeship he had ever known; but his ferret face and hate-flashing eyes had turned away any who might otherwise have "buddied" with him.

After the war, thievery and prison again. Then his release. On his way back to the miserable alleys and hovels he had known as home, walking the

lonely miles that he might hoard against hunger the transportation money given him at the prison, he had stopped at the place that had become for him the only real home he had ever enjoyed. He stopped to beg food and found . . .

"He called me 'son', Chief," he said. "Me, with my face, Dr. Rickston called 'son'! He took me in, and he and Professor Huneberg fed me. Something seemed to break inside me. I cried. I told them everything about myself, but they gave me a job. Professor said my type interested him — he wanted to study my mental 'reactions'. Their housekeeper had left, so I took her place. I could cook, and keep the house clean. They began to teach me things. I studied hard, and learned fast. I was happy."

Frankie had now grown quite calm. He went on quietly with his story, looking out into the blackness now and then to discern landmarks and judge our nearness to our destination.

"Professor Huneberg was a wonderful man. I guess I was foolish to think the Thing was still alive. He said the electrons would fly apart when he died; that the monster would cease to exist."

"Cease to exist?"

"Yes. He made it, you know, and he let it kill him so it couldn't hurt anyone else. You see you can't . . ."

"All right, Frankie," the chief interrupted again, thinking he was once more becoming hysterical; "we'll soon find out for ourselves, and then we'll kill this 'Thing,' and everything will be all right. Just keep calm, now, until we get there."

What did these seemingly hysterical words of Frankie's mean? I began to wonder if there was something more sinister behind them than we first supposed. I could not but believe that he told the truth about the deaths of the doctor and professor. But if some kind of animal killed them, what did he mean by its "ceasing to exist"? By its electrons "flying apart"?

"Well, anyway," Frankie continued, "I've written it all down in my letter. You can read it, or I can tell you about it when we get back to town. But the professor must have been right. He was too smart a man not to know what he was talking about. We probably won't find a thing."

Frankie again peered through the rain-streaked windshield. Out here in the country the slushy snow was whiter, and the flying landscape became recognizable to him.

"There's the place," he exclaimed suddenly, pointing, "back off the road in that grove of pines. They gave it its name on account of those trees. Turn in at that stone pillar. That's the driveway."

THE OFFICER driving skillfully skidded the car into the narrow lane leading back to the house. The rapidly melting snow was unbroken by the tracks of any vehicle, but the headlights of the car illuminated plainly the footprints of Frankie, left in his terror-stricken flight from the place.

It looked foreboding. Squatting among its guardian pines, the ancient dwelling resembled some gargantuan monster of the dark. No light showed, but as we pulled up before the front entrance, we heard the cries of various animals coming from the rear.

"Those are the professor's animals," Frankie volunteered, "the ones he used in his experiments. Poor things! I didn't dare leave my room even to feed them. They are cold and starving."

"I haven't got a key to the front door, Chief," he said as we got out of the car. "I'll go to the back, and come through and open it. No use you wading through the snow."

His fear, by this time, seemed entirely gone. In a matter-of-fact way he prepared to admit us to the house.

"Wait a minute, not so fast," the chief said, as Frankie started around the house. "Jim — to one of the officers — 'you go with him. McGruder and Flynn will station themselves on each side of the house. Shoot any-

thing you see running from it, and don't miss!"

"It's all right, Chief. If it's still there, it is shut up in the laboratory," Frankie said.

"We're taking no chances. Go ahead."

Frankie and the officer whom the chief had called Jim disappeared around the side of the house. The other two withdrew a short distance where they could watch all sides, while the chief, Mac, and I waited at the front door to be admitted.

We heard a door open and close in the rear. The animals in the professor's zoo set up a great whining and crying as they heard and scented human beings moving around them.

Presently we heard footsteps and voices in the room on the other side of the door we faced. Through the cracks in the drawn blinds we saw the lights flash on. We heard Frankie's voice moan, "God! There's Dr. Rickston, just as I put him in that chair. Oh — Doctor!" Then we heard him scream: "Look! The glass in the laboratory door is broken! The Thing! It's broken out! It's alive! It's in here some . . ."

A scream! Frankie's scream! Then a horrible mingling of animal sounds. Roars, snarls, snapping of jaws mingled with agonized human cries in a bedlam of blood-chilling noise. Thumps, thuds; like the floor being flailed by a human body!



Sharp cracks, as of breaking bones. The hoarse voice of Jim mouthing incoherent words in abject terror. Then the repeated roars from his gun, as he instinctively and blindly pulled the trigger.

The chief was battering on the door with feet and fists. "Open up!" he shouted; "open the door, Jim!"

No answer.

The sounds within died away. The last we distinguished was a low moan, then silence.

THE COMBINED strength of the three of us in one battering rush tore off the lock, and the door swung open, revealing to our startled eyes a sight I hope never to see again. The chief called out to Flynn and McGruder: "Stay where you are, men," and turned to survey the scene.

Jim had almost reached the door in his attempt to escape. He lay against the wall in a dead faint, but otherwise unharmed. The Thing was not in sight. Sprawled in a chair in a corner was the body of a man I instantly recognized as Dr. Rickston, while in the shadow of a huge library table, over which blazed an electric fixture, lay all that remained of Frankie the Frown. Horribly mangled, broken and bleeding, he scarcely resembled a human being. His clothing was torn to ribbons, and clutched in his hand

were a few scraps of bloody paper.

The chief gently extracted these from the clenched fingers, whispering as he did so: "Part of his letter! Where's the rest of it?"

He glanced around the room, but the pages were nowhere to be seen. The chief thrust the fragments of the letter in his pocket; there was no time to look for the rest now. An unknown danger surrounded us.

Mac and I stood guard with riot guns, half expecting some inconceivable and horrible monstrosity to leap on us from some place of concealment. Tensely we listened for sounds indicating its presence. All was quiet except for the cries from small animals somewhere in the rear. Our eyes roved nervously about the room, noting the arrangement of doors and furniture. The length of the long library ran crosswise of the house. At its right end was the fatal door, the shattered glass bearing mute evidence of the Thing's escape into the library. In the wall facing us was a door leading to the rear, evidently the one through which Frankie and Jim had entered the room. It was closed. At the left end was a huge fireplace with its dead ashes, occupying most of the wall space. Near the hearth a flight of steps with open balustrade rose, paused at a landing, and turning, continued

upward to the right until they disappeared above the ceiling level. An unlighted wall bracket hung over the landing to light the stairs. To our left, heavily curtained windows broke the front wall of the house beside the door we had entered. In spite of the more shocking objects, my eyes rested on and noted such incongruous things, as an emergency gasoline student's lamp resting on the mantel, pictures on the wall, and books and magazines on the table. Where was the beast? The darkened laboratory at our right, with its broken glass door, held terrifying possibilities.

The chief moved cautiously toward the laboratory door, lips compressed in deadly determination. We flanked his movements with ready weapons. It was evident that the laboratory and upstairs rooms furnished the only possible hiding-place of the beast.

Trembling with excitement, we neared the broken door. The chief threw a ray from his flashlight through the jagged opening. Nothing was seen of the beast as he swept it about the room. He reached through and released the lock, cautiously swung open the door, and finding a switch beside it, pressed it and flooded the room with light. We entered and found ourselves in a marvelously well-equipped laboratory.

A barred window, with rain-streaked panes, was opposite the door we had entered. Another door, open, at the left, or back end of the room, revealed an iron grating through which came the distressed cries of various animals. I gasped with dismay at the litter of broken instruments, test-tubes, and scientific equipment scattered about.

LOOKING around, we found the body of Professor Huneberg crumpled on the floor, between the large work-table and the window. "All dead!" the chief muttered, after his quick glance disproved the possibility of the beast's presence in the laboratory.

The professor's cold form had also been brutally torn and broken, but like the doctor, he had ceased breathing at least thirty-six hours before. Saddened beyond measure, I almost forgot the necessity of quickly finding and destroying the cause of this carnage. I was visualizing that magnificent physique as it had been in life. His six feet of powerful frame had borne a proud head with its dark beard and hair, and eyes that flashed with almost unearthly intelligence from the wonderful brain behind them. In appearance, he was the very opposite of the doctor, who, with his mild blue eyes, white hair and beard, and frail form,

presented a sharp contrast to his companion.

The chief, after his hurried examination, abruptly left the room, and was followed by Mac. I took one more hasty look about, and followed them, snapping off the light and partially closing the door.

The chief was again examining Frankie's body. He arose and silently pointed to a narrow streak of bloodstain that ran in a line toward the stairs. He moved toward them, Mac and I following, but I confess with less bravado than his stalwart form presented. At the foot of the step he paused, and spoke gravely, "Men, we don't know what kind of beast this is we are about to face. There is not the slightest doubt that it is lurking upstairs, probably in the hall. From the appearance of its victims, it kills differently, more brutally, than anything I ever saw before. You must be right, Doctor; it surely is a hybrid of the professor's developing. What horrible shape he gave it we can only conjecture — until we see it.

"I will go upstairs — there is not room in the hall for three of us to fight it — and if my shots don't stop it, I will retreat. You and Mac stand where you can shoot through the balustrade. If it gets past us we still have Flynn and McGruder outside."

We started to protest, but he

waved us to silence, and finding a switch that lighted the wall bracket at the landing, began to mount the stairs, gun ready for instant action. He turned at the landing and continued upward, his head and shoulders disappearing above the ceiling level, but his feet and legs still visible through the balustrade as, step by step, he approached the top. Now they too, were gone, and we heard his soft footfalls in the hall above. Then silence.

We held our breaths. We listened apprehensively for the expected burst of shots that would tell of his meeting with the monster.

THE SOUND OF his footsteps resumed. Our eyes were glued to that last visible point of steps where their angle met the ceiling line. In a moment a foot appeared there, feeling cautiously for the next step down. He was coming down, *backward*, without firing a shot!

Slowly, uncertainly, the other foot appeared, and felt behind its mate for a lower step. What did the chief see? Why didn't he shoot?

Slowly, hesitatingly, grudgingly, he backed down to the landing, and then his body came into view, arm rigidly holding the gun-butt against his shoulder, pointing the weapon upstairs. He held his flashlight in the other hand. A look

of puzzled amazement shone from his distended eyes. For a moment he paused at the landing, and then continued, still backward, down to where we stood. Trembling slightly, though I was sure not from fear, he stood still, holding gun and eyes on the landing.

"For God's sake, Chief, what is it?" Mac whispered.

He did not answer. I was watching that last visible step, momentarily expecting to see a hairy paw come into view as the beast descended. My hands gripped my weapon like steel vises. In silence we waited — waited.

Suddenly, above the landing, appeared something floating, swaying, in midair. The light from the bracket fell full upon it, a mass of something white and black with red splotches. It was a scrap of cloth and a handful of torn bloody papers, *apparently held in the talons of some monstrous, inconceivable, invisible horror!*

"There's your *animal!*" the chief gritted through clenched teeth.

"Damn!" Mac whispered. "You can't see it!"

We stood paralyzed with astonishment. Incredulity, amazement, horror must have mingled on our countenances, as we waited.

A low growling, a snapping of invisible jaws smote our ears. A stench, putrid, nauseating,

spread and filled the room until my stomach retched. Then: "Look," Mac whispered. The light bracket was bending slowly downward — bending, as though the metal tubing was melting, and too soft to hold up the socket and shade. It bent and twisted until the wires were short-circuited, a fuse blew out, and the room was plunged into inky blackness.

"Light that lamp!" the chief shouted, and sought to throw the beam of his flashlight on the stairs. Only a moment it burned, and then failed. Again the darkness, broken this time by jets of flame as the chief fired blindly at the thing on the landing. He hurled the useless flashlight after the streams of lead. It thudded against the wall and fell to the landing. With its characteristic stubbornness it again lit up, and threw a spot of light against the baseboard. In the reflected light we saw the mass of bloody papers and bit of cloth describing grotesque gyrations in the air above the steps.

THE THING was making the air hideous with its screams and awful stench. We backed hastily away to the center of the room. Intermittent flares from Mac's matches, as he struggled with the refractory lamp, only made the almost total darkness more sinister, more fraught with the terror of a possible over-

whelming rush from the invisible monster.

After what seemed hours, Mac succeeded in coaxing a flame from the mantle of the lamp, and as he placed it on the table, we saw the bloody scraps of cloth and paper float-swiftly and jerkily toward us. We backed to the open front door, and halted there.

THE chief coolly and methodically emptied his gun at the screams and snarls coming from the thin air before us. Mac did the same. Then the roar of my gun drowned the unearthly cries. Plaster and pictures fell from the wall opposite, but the cloth and papers still hovered above the table! Why the Thing did not overwhelm us in one savage rush I do not know.

We hastily reloaded our guns in the face of Mac's sudden exclamation, "My God! You can't kill it!"

Jim had by this time revived from his faint, and with a look of unutterable horror in his eyes, he dashed headlong from the house, and was taken in charge by Flynn. McGruder came up on the porch, and staring through the door, watched the unusual battle with unbelieving eyes, too much astonished to take part.

Again we directed a roaring but hopeless fusillade at that unseen presence. Amid a bedlam of sound, the roar of our

guns commingling with screams and shrieks from our maddened, invisible target, the lamp was suddenly raised from the table, suspended a second in mid-air, and sent by an unseen force hurtling, crashing into the wall at our left. There it exploded.

Burning splashes of gasoline scattered all over the room, igniting everything they touched. Frantically, we slapped at our burning clothing, sustaining, luckily, but few burns. The room was in flames. We removed our coats, and beat at the fire, but it was a hopeless task to subdue it.

THROUGH THE smoke, I saw the floating scraps of cloth and paper move swiftly toward the laboratory door. The door swung open, the bloody mass disappeared into the darkened room, and the door slammed shut. I heard the crash of glass in the laboratory. The Thing was trapped in there. Possibly the fire would accomplish what we had failed to do.

Driven to the open, we were helpless to drag out the corpses, helpless to do anything but watch, as the old mansion became a roaring furnace, and its surrounding guardian pines flaming torches.

Flames soon burst out from the barred laboratory window, and as a last high-pitched scream from within died away, we were sure, and were devout-

ly thankful, that the Thing was not invulnerable. The fire had destroyed it.

Mac turned to Mandell. "Chief," he said, "Frankie's letter is gone. Now we'll never know what the Thing . . ."

"But," interrupted Mandell, "you owe your life to the fact that the Thing happened to retain the letter in its claws when it tore Frankie to pieces. I shudder to think of our fate had its presence not been made known to us by those bloody papers."

A few hours later, a trio of mystified men — the chief, Mac and I — were deciphering the few and half-effaced words on the scraps of Frankie's letter which the chief had salvaged from his fingers. Just enough of them were legible to whet still more our curiosity regarding the origin of the Thing. They were few, indeed, but they carried a hint of some terrible experiment. We dared not make public the true facts of the night's experiences.

THE NEXT morning, Mac and I visited the scene of the fire with the coroner. The little that was left of the victims sickened me. Mac was poking about among the ruins with a stick. I saw him stoop, turn over a charred board, pick something from among the debris and thrust it hastily in his pocket. He came quickly to where I stood, well out of ear-

shot of the coroner and his helpers.

"I've got 'em!" he whispered excitedly; "the pages of Frankie's letter. The Thing must have broken the window and dropped them outside before the fire got to them. A falling board flattened them into the snow, and they were saved."

WE hastened back to town, and hurried to the chief's office to tell him the news, and read, together, the explanation of the Thing's existence. Again we were bitterly disappointed. It was impossible to read the story on those blood-stained, water-soaked and torn sheets of paper. Only a comparatively few words were legible.

Mac was downcast. "What a story! What a whale of a story!" he grieved. "If only . . ."

"Yes," the chief answered, "but you wouldn't dare print it."

"I guess you are right, Chief, but I could *read* it."

"You may yet have that privilege," I said, gathering up the pages, and accepting from the chief the other scraps he had put in his desk. "I will see what the judicious use of a few acids will do toward making these readable."

For days I worked. It was a tedious, laborious task, but I succeeded. Mac called each day, and pleaded to be permitted to read the pages as I restored them, but I forced him

to wait until the whole was finished.

At last it was done, and I held the patched and stained, but legible pages in my hand.

That evening I had guests — just two: Mac and Chief Mandell. Well, they knew why they had been invited. Both illy concealed their curiosity regarding the story I was to read them. I could not resist the temptation to heighten the drama by keeping them in suspense. Leisurely I reached into a desk drawer, and then held up to their gaze those gruesome pages.

Each, for a moment, held the sheaf of papers in a trembling hand. I knew that they were visualizing them as they had first seen them, floating, jerking in midair, clutched in the claw of that mysterious entity whose secret the blurred words were now about to reveal.

I TOOK THE pages, settled myself in a chair, and prepared to read. The chief stood on the hearth, back to the fire, nervously teetering on heels and toes. Mac restlessly paced a short journey between table and bookcase, back and forth.

The letter began: "Chief Mandell:

"For God's sake, heed these words! I am hiding in the room of a house in which lie the bodies of Professor Alexis Huneberg and Dr. Artemus J. Rickston. In the laboratory, with

the body of the professor, there lurks, I am afraid, the horrible monster of his creation that killed him. If it still exists, and should escape, God pity the world! Through the highways and byways would it stalk, tearing limb from limb all whom it should meet, and none to know what it was; for, Chief, this monster is invisible!

"I am almost crazed with fear, but I must write this, and you must believe it, for the safety of thousands may depend on your accepting what I tell you as the truth. Also, there will be no rest for me, no sanity, until I know if this Thing is still alive, or non-existent. I have tried a dozen times to force myself to go back into that awful room to find out, but I am afraid. My legs fail me, my nerves collapse. Then, too, when the bodies are found, and my presence here becomes known, I would be hunted, always, as a murderer, if the monster does not now exist. My black record would be sufficient to convict me; for you know me, Chief — I am Frankie the Frown.

"I can't stay here much longer. I have no food, and no water. Terror lurks in the rest of the house; I dare not leave this room. But tonight I'll run from the house, and mail this letter to you from another town.

"You must believe this, Chief, and bring men to destroy this

awful monster. I don't know how you will do it, but I'll tell all I know about it, and maybe you can consult some scientist, and find a way.

"I'll tell you how I came to be here, Chief, and then you will know I did not kill the doctor and professor, the only friends I ever had.

"I came here when I got out of jail, a little over a year ago."

Here followed a more detailed account of Frankie's meeting with his benefactors, an enlargement of the story he had told us in the speeding police car; of how they had befriended him; of his regeneration. He told of his studies under the tutelage of Dr. Rickston; of how he assisted Professor Huneberg in his experiments; of how he grew to almost worship these two men, the first humans to show him any love.

I TAKE UP the thread of his story further along in its pages:

"I had been here about nine months when I noticed a subtle change in the professor.

"I had by this time laid the foundation for a good education. My starved mind seemed to soak up knowledge as a sponge does water. I became intensely interested in my employers' work, having grasped, by this time, some understanding of their various experiments. The professor's work, especially,

fascinated me. He practiced what he called painless vivisection on animal after animal. The brain was his especial study. Time after time I had seen him remove parts of the skull from different species of monkey, carefully parting the convolutions of the brain-matter, holding life in the body until the last possible moment, only to shake his head in disappointment, and plunge again into study. One day I asked him what he was searching for, and he said, 'The secret of life, my boy.' I was not surprised, and such was my confidence in him that I did not doubt he would find it. He did.

"But a change came over him. He became silent, moody. His eyes continually carried a far-away look, into which at times came a glance of fear. This became more marked, as the days went by. He lost weight, ate little, seemed to be losing health rapidly. The doctor was deeply engrossed in some important work of his own, and did not notice it. I began to worry.

"It was one night in the fall when the thing happened that made me doubt his sanity — and mine, too, for that matter.

"We had retired early; the doctor and professor in their bedrooms upstairs, and I in my room here on the ground floor. I could not sleep, and after two hours or so of tossing about, arose and wandered into the



living-room, thinking to read awhile. Before I could turn on the light, I heard a voice in the laboratory. It was the professor's. I stepped softly to the open door, wondering whom he could be talking to. There were no lights in there either, but the moon shone brightly through the barred window, and I could see everything plainly. The professor was standing by the worktable, one hand resting on its glass top and the other pointing a long finger at the iron grating which covered the open door into the zoo. I held my breath. He seemed to be talking to the animals — in his sleep. But no; his eyes were bright, intelligence shone from them. What were these strange words he was saying? . . .

"Ah, you are there. I can not see you, but I know you exist, beast of beasts. In my mind's eye, I see your form taking shape. Would that I could see you in reality, monster. But no; on second thought, perhaps the sight of your form in the flesh would be too awful for mere human to behold and remain sane. Now your presence manifests itself. The monkeys are cowering in paralyzed and silent terror in their cages; your stench chokes my nostrils; your jaws snap; your claws rake the floor as you throw your invisible bulk against the bars . . ."

"Chief, I stood frozen to the spot. I swear that as he spoke

I breathed in a reeking stink, like one that comes from a long-dead body taken from the sea. I heard a snapping of jaws and a furious scratching on the floor beyond the iron grating. Something shook and rattled the barred door. The passage on the other side of it was plainly illuminated by the moonbeams, but *nothing was there; something invisible was shaking those bars!* The professor's voice went on:

"Ah, what a triumph for the mind of man. Created — actually created from the emanations from the chemical of life! You are powerful, but the mind of man is more powerful still, for I control your existence and keep you behind those bars. But I am puzzled to know what use to make of you. . . . I admit it — I am afraid of you. I feel a slight weakness in concentrating on the thought that you are *behind* those bars. I played with the thought of materializing you here in the laboratory. And the fact that I incorporated the Horla in your makeup I regret, for the Horla was a nemesis — de Maupassant could not overcome it and finally tried to commit suicide. Ah, I wonder if I shall have to . . . but not yet, beast of beasts. I must decide first whether it be safe to give you to the world of science, and . . ."

"That is all I heard — that night. Finding strength to move,

I fled in silent terror to my room.

"The next morning, I approached the zoo at feeding time reluctantly, but everything seemed to be in order. The monkeys and other animals seemed to have forgotten their terror of the night, but on this side of the iron grating, plainly imprinted in the sawdust on the floor, were strange grotesque footprints! With a shuddering foot, I obliterated them.

"Fearing to cause him unnecessary worry, I said nothing of the night's experience to the doctor. The professor looked haggard, but a strange light gleamed in his eyes.

"For several nights after that, he crept down to the laboratory; there to hold practically the same conversation with the Thing, which seemed to come into being at his will. Each night I followed him, and listened until my trembling nerves forced me to flee to my room. How he produced the phenomenon I did not then learn, and I dared not ask him.

"After three or four nights of eavesdropping came the gruesome end of these nightly visits.

"I HAD FOLLOWED the professor's clandestine footsteps as usual, but when I softly crept to the laboratory door, he was not in sight. A noise in the zoo drew my eyes to the grating. It was open. Presently he came into view leading Chika, the larg-

est of his collection of monkeys. He then fastened the poor beast to the grating with a short chain. Stepping into the laboratory, he closed and locked the grating, and stood for a moment gazing through the bars at the trembling monkey. The professor moved to the work-table, turned, and again faced the grating. Chika, on the zoo side of the bars, clung to them, whimpering, and peered piteously between them at his master. Instinct must have warned him of a terrible fate.

"The professor began to speak; to summon, from God knows where, that awful, foul-smelling, invisible horror. In a moment my startled eyes saw the monkey rise quickly into midair, where he hung, suspended, twisting and squirming. Again terror possessed me, and I fled, the beast's smothered shrieks in my ears.

"The next morning, my worst fears were justified: Chika was gone. The professor muttered something about the monkey taking sick in the night; fearing contagion, he said, he had taken him out and buried him. But in the sawdust on the floor before the grating I found a hairy foot, with dangling bloody tendons! I almost cried aloud in horror at this discovery. I decided that I would face the professor with my knowledge of it, and beg and plead with him to stop his nightly creation of the monster. I would follow the

professor to the laboratory, and present myself before he had time to demonstrate his power.

"After retiring, I lay listening for his soft footfalls, as he would pass through the hall above my head. I did not hear them. Long after the usual time for his nightly visit to the laboratory, I listened. He did not go. Sleep finally claimed me.

"Abruptly I was thrust back into consciousness by a shrill scream. It was repeated. I leaped from bed and dashed upstairs. The doctor's voice drew me into the professor's room, where he was soothing and quieting the terror-stricken man. 'Nightmare,' the doctor said, and after a few moments' conversation, we again retired.

"THIS was the beginning of a series of nightly disturbances of like nature, in which it became more and more difficult to rouse the professor from these awful experiences. They did not seem like nightmares to me, but rather the screams of terror from a man who, wide-awake but helpless, sees some nocturnal, but real, horror about to overwhelm him.

"The professor's clandestine visits to the laboratory ceased, but each night we were awakened by his screams. Day by day he declined in health. The doctor, alarmed at his condition, vainly attempted to diagnose his ailment, but could learn

nothing, increasingly mystified by the recurrent nightmares.

"At last came the incident that preceded the tragedy. Day before yesterday, it was. It seems weeks.

"The professor, looking wan and haggard, was in the laboratory. The doctor sat at one end of the library table, examining various medical works, his mind on the professor's ailment. At the other end of the table I sat studying. I glanced through the open door into the laboratory, where the professor was peering through the microscope at a bit of chemical on a slide. Something in his attitude caught, and held, my attention. He raised his head as if to rest his eyes. I saw him wearily pass his hand across them, then look absently into the zoo. Suddenly he stiffened, his eyes bulged in horror as though beholding some awful menace. He suddenly flung out his hands before him in a gesture of defense, and then — screamed! We ran in, caught his flailing arms, and, with difficulty, finally quieted him. We led him into the library, and laid him on the couch. The doctor administered a sedative, and he rested quietly for a half-hour.

"WE were astonished at this coming on him in the daytime. Now we knew it was no ordinary nightmare. We feared the worst: he was going insane. While we were discussing, in

whispers, his trouble, the professor sat up and spoke:

"This is the end, my dear friends. I can resist it no longer. Tomorrow I shall tell you all. I shall reveal to you the most astonishing discovery the world of science has ever known, and then take my departure into that spiritual world where the soul is at peace, undisturbed by the turbulent emotions and ambitions of this mortal mind. And now, Doctor, if you will give me a sleeping draft, and stay by me through the evening and night, I believe I can rest, and disturb you no more."

"THE PROFESSOR rested well that night, and the next morning he was more cheerful, although quiet. He spent most of the day in going over his private affairs, placing certain legal papers in a large envelope which he handed to the doctor, saying, 'You may open them after I am gone, and dispose of my possessions not mentioned therein as you see fit, Doctor. As you know, I have no relatives.'

"We were stunned by his calm preparations for death; we couldn't believe it. Aimlessly the doctor and I dragged out the day.

"Late in the afternoon, the professor called us around the big library table, and after we were seated, spent a few moments in silent meditation. Then

he began his amazing explanation. I'll try to write it in his own words as accurately as possible, Chief, for you may have to call in some scientist to find a way to destroy the monster, if the professor was wrong and it still exists.

"I had hoped,' the professor began, 'to overcome the weakness that drew my mind into dangerous channels, but I find it impossible. Voluntarily I shall become a martyr to science, and by so doing remove from you a very real danger, that — God forgive me! — I myself created.

"Doctor, I am confident that I have discovered the true secret of life itself, and that Frankie here may understand it I will word my explanation in the simplest form possible.

"Science has determined that all substance is made up of cohering atoms, which in turn are, individually, miniature solar systems, with their planetlike electrons revolving around a sunlike nucleus. Science has also practically decided that these cohering atoms vibrate at various rates. Therefore we must conclude that all living creatures, composed of various substances with their vibrating atoms, depend upon vibrations for life. Life is vibration.

"Now, we naturally demand to know what sets up and maintains that vibration. Ah, when we find the answer to that question, we will have delved as

deeply as it is possible to go into the secret of life. I am sure that I have found that answer!

"The professor paused for a moment, and then went on:

"Imagine a machine, an intricate, marvelously constructed machine; for example, the human body. It is the most wonderful we know of. To live, to move, its atoms must constantly vibrate. Whence comes, and what is, the force that energizes them? My theory, which I have proved to my own satisfaction, is this:

"Deep within the machine, in a hidden compartment possibly in the brain, lies a bit of radioactive mineral. So delicate is it, that if we were to break open the machine to find it, it would, upon being exposed, immediately disintegrate. Now let us see how it produces life.

"The bit of mineral, at its normal rate of disintegration, bombards the atoms of the machine with constant streams of flying particles, or electrons, analogous to the comets we see flashing through our solar system. We have a comparison in the similar action of a bit of radium. However, unlike radium, our life-giving mineral can never be isolated and analyzed.

"Under the ceaseless hammering of the streams of electrons from the mineral, the atoms in the human machine vibrate, the machine moves, and there we have life! Finally the

bit of mineral is exhausted. No longer are the atoms bombarded with its flying particles; they cease to vibrate; the machine stops, rusts away, disintegrates; and there we have death!

"But what becomes of the electrons thrown off from the bit of life-giving mineral? Ah, again like those mysterious wanderers, the comets, they journey on an inconceivable orbit. But eventually, as if willed or directed by some supreme Intelligence, they come together, collide, are fused into a new mass in an embryo, and again take up the work of producing the life-giving vibrations in a new human machine. Do you not see how this all fits in with the half-believed theory that our own solar system is but an atom in some vast cosmic body?

"Human intelligence — the mind, the soul, or whatever name we give it — seems to be a force within, yet not an integral part of the machine. My theory is that it is an induction, a sort of magnetic field, produced by the whirring flight of the flying particles of mineral. We know that an induced or secondary current of electricity, if properly collected and brought to bear on the primary or producing current, can materially disturb its progress. Now, the mind, or thought, can have a similar effect on the flying electrons from the bit of radioactive mineral. In fact, intense

concentration can control, to a certain extent, their orbit, or arrest, temporarily, their flight through space. Telepathy, the power of mind over matter, faith-healing, and other more or less proven powers of the mind illustrate this. Perhaps this proves the Biblical assertion that man is made in the likeness of God, whose supreme Intelligence directs and controls the electronlike comets of a great cosmic body. Though it grieves me to be compelled to shock you with the tragedy of it, I am about to give you a practical demonstration of my theory.

"AS A CHILD, I was endowed with an unusual imagination. Growing to manhood, this characteristic developed into an ability to concentrate thought to the nth degree. When I formed my theory of life, I set about to prove it. Not being able to find the mysterious mineral in the bodies of animals by vivisection, I went on to the next step in the experiment, which was to attempt to arrest and control, and form into some active organization, the flying electrons through intense concentration.

"I had always been interested in tales of the bizzare, the mysterious. My imagination would run rampant in picturing their grotesque subjects. From them I conceived the idea of creating a creature whose

main characteristic would be — invisibility! I selected Bierce's sharp-fanged and colorless enigma, *The Damned Thing*; F. Marion Crawford's slimy, powerful, and noisome horror in *The Upper Berth*; and the intangible, persistent *Horla* of de Maupassant. I imagined a combination of this horrific trio; I concentrated on that mental picture; the flight of emanating particles of mineral from the lode in my brain was arrested; they formed into a gaseous, invisible mass; and — it came into being!

"I protected myself by visualizing the horror beyond the barred door in the passage to the zoo. I saw the sawdust on the floor fly from under the scratching claws of *The Damned Thing*! I smelt the nauseating stench from the creature of *The Upper Berth* as it shook the iron bars of the grating! I felt the terrifying unseen presence of *The Horla*! God! It was uncanny; and although I was elated at the proving of my theory, I was much afraid, and came quickly from the laboratory. My mind drawn away from concentration, the particles or electrons were released from its restraining power; they resumed their flight, and the invisible creature ceased to be!

"But I was fascinated by the experiment; my mind ran wild, and nightly I repeated, with growing perfection, the

creation of that unseen horror. Finally, to test its power, I took the monkey Chika from his cage, tied him to the bars of the grating, went into the laboratory, and watching, concentrating, saw, through the bars, poor Chika literally torn to pieces by the unnamable terror I had brought into being!

"The professor paused, and mopped, with shaking hand, a damp brow.

" THAT was enough. I quit my terrible experimenting — too late! Then came the nightmares. But you were wrong in calling them that. They were the result of my inability to keep my mind from the Thing. I would, without volition, begin its creation in my bedroom. Terrorized, I would cry out; you would come to me, and my mind would be drawn away from it. After yesterday's experience in the laboratory, I fully realized the danger. It was inevitable that the Thing would get beyond my control. You, Doctor, and Frankie, were in constantly increasing danger. And so this is the end. I shall go into the laboratory, bring this Thing into being for the last time, and allow it to destroy this human machine of mine. After which, of course, the electrons forming it will be released from the control of my mind, resume their flight, and the danger will be forever removed. That is all."

"THE DOCTOR AND I, when he had finished, sat amazed, as though turned to stone. I believed the story, because of the things I had seen, but the doctor, finally speaking, suspected a flaw in the professor's reasoning. With trembling voice, he spoke:

"But, Professor, are you quite sure the emanations from the mineral will be released after death? May not the electrons continue to form the Thing, and it remain in existence, for ever presenting an invincible menace to all mankind?"

"Yes, Doctor, I am quite sure," he answered. "You have seen that I have brought it into existence several times, yet it does not now exist. That proves your fears are groundless."

"I know that it does not now exist, Professor, but may it not have ceased to be at the end of each materialization because you *willed* it so? If the mind could bring it into being, it may be necessary for it also to will it *out* of existence. Thus, if you die with this horror extant, its form may remain indefinitely as you created it, because of the lack of further control from your mind. This could easily be possible, as witness the electrons revolving around the nucleus in an atom, or the comets racing on definite orbits through myriad universes; once set on a course, they continue to follow it."

"No, Doctor, I am sure I am

right. The time grows short, or I might be able to refute your theory by reasoning. Instead, I will prove its fallacy by demonstration. I am afraid my mind will not remain much longer in control. To avoid danger, I must go; I must say good-bye.'

"'Nol Nol' we cried, springing up in grief-stricken protest.

'Doctor, we have been lifelong friends. Your companionship has meant more to me than I can express in words. Together we have worked to increase knowledge, and our labors have been not all in vain. But to you shall be given the honor of announcing my discovery to the world of science. It's well; I would not have it otherwise. To me the discovery justifies the end. *Sic itur ad astra* — thus one goes to the stars; such is the way to immortality.'

'Turning to me he said: 'My boy, your life here with us has given the lie to those who would say, "Ye can not be born again," and if I had any part in your regeneration, I have been amply repaid by your devotion to us, and your unselfish ministrations to me in my affliction. I charge you with the duty of remaining with the doctor, and comforting him in his declining years, which can not be so very numerous.'

'Then his voice grew stern as he spoke further: 'Do not, under any circumstances, come into the laboratory until it is all

over; until silence within betokens all danger past. Again, my dear friends, farewell!'

'He gripped our hands firmly, and stepped quickly into the laboratory. Closing the door, he drew the blind over its glass panel. For a moment we were paralyzed with fear of what was about to happen; then with a common impulse we sprang to the door, where some unseen power seemed to hold us back. Of course we could do nothing, even had we had the power to think coherently.

'Within, all was quiet for a few moments. Presently I detected that terribly nauseating odor creeping from the crack under the door. Then came a hoarse cry and a dull thud, as though the professor had fallen. The jar released the catch on the blind, and it snapped up, revealing to our startled eyes a sight that I hope no man ever sees again.

'The professor was supine on the floor, writhing and twisting into horribly grotesque attitudes. His eyes, filled with indescribable terror, were seemingly gazing into a face just above his, but we could see no other presence in the room. His mouth was opening slowly, forced by an invisible pry. The cords stood out from his neck, as the muscles involuntarily resisted the action. Slowly the lower jaw came down. Wider opened his mouth, until the bones parted with a



sickening crack, and the chin lay loosely on the throat.

"We gasped in horror, rooted to the spot. The doctor moaned in sickened pity. A terrible fascination seemed to hold our eyes on the frightful scene.

"Mingled with the inarticulate cries and moans from the professor, we heard a continuous snarling and snapping from unseen jaws. Great blood-spurting gashes appeared all over his body, as clothing and flesh were ripped to ribbons. His legs and arms were moving about, assuming tortuous positions, the bones crunching and snapping between invisible fangs. Mauled and torn, gashed and broken, the poor tortured body was suddenly flung upward, suspended in midair then began to bend and double, backward, head and shoulders meeting the hips as the spine broke with a sickening report. The bleeding and shapeless corpse of the professor fell to the floor, and the sacrifice was ended.

"The doctor released his deathlike grip on my arm, and staggered backward. Before I could catch him, he fainted, and fell heavily, his head striking the library table. I lifted him and placed him in a chair, but death was already glazing his eyes. As I saw that, all reason left my benumbed brain, and I fled, screaming, to my room, where I am now hiding and writing this.

"But, Chief, maybe the doctor was right. Maybe that Thing is still in there, alive. If it is, God help . . ."

THUS, ABRUPTLY, the letter ended. At this point Frankie's light had burned out, and left him in the dark; terror had overwhelmed him, and snatching up the pages, he fled.

As I finished reading the explanation of the horror that had so nearly overcome us, I raised my eyes and looked at Mac and Chief Mandell. Finally Mac blew out his breath and shook his head.

"I believe it," he said, "and so do you. But nobody else would. We'll have to cook up some story that sounds plausible to account for what happened there at The Pines. . . . And for the first time, I can understand why suppressing the facts of a case might really be in the public interest."

"At least for the time being," I said.

"For a long time," Chief Mandell amended.

We shook hands all around, and I put the papers away, where they have rested until now. The precise explanation of how the professor created the Thing was not among these sheets, nor was anything left of the house. I wonder still if I would have destroyed the explanation if it had been available to me. I wonder, even more,

if I would have tried to make use of it.

That I never had to face this

temptation is something for which I will always be grateful.