

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1943

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90¢. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Vol. 38, No. 12

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

The Unfriendly World

By ALLISON V. HARDING

I FIRST heard about George Torey when a colleague of mine at Belvedere Hospital where I am on the psychiatric staff came to me and said: "Dr. Manning, I've got a patient who won't sleep. From the medical standpoint, he seems on the mend but he has a strange fear of sleep. I wonder if you'd look in on the case?"

That was the beginning. Dr. Cobb, the M.D. in charge, gave me the following details: Torey had been in an automobile accident. He had been pretty badly smashed up. A couple of broken ribs, a dislocated elbow and a badly wrenched back. But there didn't seem to be any complications, at least, at first. But by now, when he should be getting well—he wasn't. He was afraid of going to sleep. A thirty-year-old man afraid of going to sleep like, well, like a little kid.

"I've come to the conclusion that there must be some sort of mental hitch here somewhere," Cobb told me that first day in the doctors' lunchroom. "Mr. Torey keeps begging for sedatives at night, for sleeping medicines. Yet he admits he isn't in pain. If we won't give them to him, he tries to keep himself awake. Of course, I've asked him to explain his horror of sleep. He tells me the most outlandish stories." Dr. Cobb shook his head.

I asked the nature of these stories. Cobb hesitated, then said, "I'd like you to get the whole picture directly from him. Can you come up this afternoon?"

I said I'd work it in somehow.

I confess I didn't think much more about Mr. Torey for the rest of the afternoon.

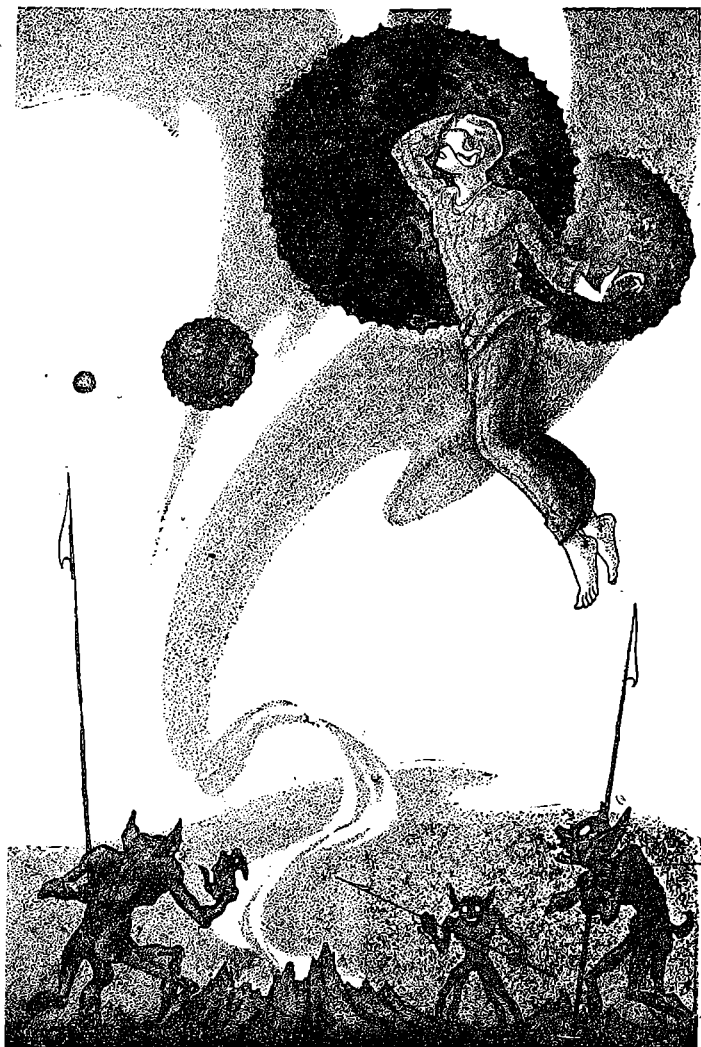
After all, we psychiatrists see many patients who are afraid of about everything, including going to sleep. It's not uncommon in a case of overwrought emotions. Torey, from Cobb's description, had had quite a smash-up. My snap hunch was that the man was still suffering from the after-effects of severe shock. That's all I thought about it.

At 4:30 that afternoon I went upstairs and asked the floor nurse for Mr. Torey's room. When I went in, Cobb was waiting for me. He grabbed my hand as though he were really glad to see me and led me over to the bed.

"Mr. Torey, this is Dr. Manning. He's the chap I've told you about. I think he's going to be able to help us with your sleeping difficulties."

Torey simply groaned. I still hadn't gotten a look at him. His head was turned in toward the wall. One lean hand was visible, clutching the bed clothes in a vise-like grip.

All attempts to invade a world outside our own should be discouraged! Such an invasion would be fraught with deadly consequences too horrible for beings of this earth to confront.



COBB stood uncertainly for a minute and then said, "I'll leave you alone with Mr. Torey." I heard him go to the door and close it softly behind him.

I pulled a chair up close to the bed. Torey still kept his face toward the wall.

"Well, now," I started in a hearty voice I meant to be reassuring, "What's the trouble? I'd like to hear all about it." And so saying, I laid my hand on his.

He jumped as though somebody had stuck a knife in him. Then he groaned again. Still not a word.

I considered the next best approach. It was then that I noticed the window was wide open. It was getting late in the afternoon and, as much to recoup my own forces, I walked over and started to lower it.

My back was to Torey. But he must have heard the sound of the window. He let out a low groan and when I turned he was sitting straight up in bed with a look of terror on his face that even I, used as I am to the terrifying grimaces of crackpots and criminals, found disquieting.

He pointed toward the window, or so I thought, and then sank back on his pillow. When I reached him, his face and arms were covered with sweat. Either extreme weakness, I thought automatically, or—extreme terror.

"Mr. Torey, won't you try and tell me what's bothering you. I want to help you. Dr. Cobb tells me you're coming along very nicely, all except along certain nervous lines." I kept my voice low and confidential this time. "Come on now, let's hear it. You'll find me a very good listener."

George Torey turned then and for the first time I really saw him. He had the high forehead and sensitive face of a man of great intellectual capacity. That face was drawn and twisted by fear now. I was almost startled by his appearance. But he seemed to find something reassuring in my

appearance for he twisted himself on his back.

I noticed he kept looking out the window of the hospital. Outside the early spring afternoon was passing into a soft dimness that preludes twilight.

"Tell me, what was it about my shutting the window that caused you to cry out just now." Perhaps there was a clue here to his strange behavior. "Is it that you are bothered by things being shut, a sort of fear of closed spaces?"

Torey smiled at that. For the first time, then, I heard him speak. His voice was cultured, controlled, though somewhat weak.

"No, Doctor, I am not troubled with claustrophobia. It's something else. Something that seems, seems quite incredible. I am intelligent enough to know that I dread the night, and when I heard you at the window, it made me realize another night was coming. It is bizarre, no, it is fantastic, absurd. I cannot expect anyone to believe." His voice shook at the end of his speech and fearful of disturbing him more, I just nodded my head slowly and once again gave him a reassuring pat on the arm. He went on: "I'm afraid to go to sleep because, because of something that happens to me when I go to sleep. I—I can't make anybody believe me—but if there is a Hell, I've been there—I've seen people there with harpoons—" He stopped abruptly. I said nothing.

WE STAYED like that for a moment, neither of us saying a word and yet I could feel that he wanted to tell me more about this thing that was eating away at his mind. For a minute, I felt a bit of resentment toward prosaic Dr. Cobb who had refused to tell me the details of this man's aberrations, but instead had simply said, with a rather weary, noncommittal shake of his head, "But I'd rather you'd get the whole picture from him direct."

Torey sat there, his lips tightly shut, his fists clenched on top of the coverlet. The perfect picture of a man trying to hold on, I thought, trying to hold on against loss of his reason, against a terror so great that it had come out of him and spilled over onto his face and into his voice.

I leaned forward again. "Won't you tell me more, Mr. Torey?"

I could see a glimmer of impatience push aside the apprehension on his face for a minute. Then his lips closed all the tighter and he turned his face toward the wall like a spoiled child.

I'll confess that as I got up from his bedside I was a bit exasperated. But underneath that irritation was a small core of uneasiness. There was something here that I couldn't quite pigeon-hole. I had seen very little of George Torey. But I had seen enough to firmly believe that here was a man who was in mortal terror for his very life.

I ran into Dr. Cobb in the corridor outside. He stopped me.

"Well, how did things go?"

I'm afraid I looked rather downcast. I shook my head with a half smile. "I don't think I enlisted Mr. Torey under my banner, Cobb. He didn't tell me a thing."

I then gave Cobb a detailed description of what had gone on.

Cobb slapped me on the back reassuringly. "Don't let it irritate you, Manning," he said. "He's one of those birds who makes life pretty hard for a doctor. He thinks we don't understand," Cobb mimicked with his face screwed up, "He doesn't want to get well and this is a method to get attention."

What a method, I thought to myself and we went down the hall to the conference room. And in my heart I wasn't so sure about things.

The next day I had forgotten about the Torey case pretty much. Then Cobb sent for me in the afternoon. He told me he

had had another terrible night with Torey. Would I look in on Torey again and try to talk things over. Of course I agreed.

As Cobb was thanking me I held up my hand. "But, Doctor, I still don't know much of what's going on. You remember you wanted me to get the details from Torey himself. I didn't get far. I'm completely in the dark. Exactly what is this thing he's afraid of? Does he know? Do you know?"

Cobb turned at the door and grinned back at me.

"Spears," he said smiling, "twisted little people with spears in some horrible nether land." I heard him chuckling as he left the room.

I SAT for quite a while thinking over the situation. Spears, and twisted little people in some nether land? It sounded like the Arabian Nights to me. Yet try as I might I could not get myself away from my hunch-faith in George Torey's sanity and intelligence.

With Cobb's permission I had a talk with Miss Foster, Torey's private nurse who had been on the case since the auto accident. Mabel Foster was one of those trim, attractive, and very efficient young ladies who is not given to speculation and wild flights of fancy. She'd taken good care of some of my own cases and I knew her work.

She told me, as had Cobb, that George Torey had been afraid of something from the time he had entered the hospital. He had fussed and fretted. The staff thought it was the result of a caved-in side and his general shaking up. But even after he had improved physically, he still remained just as nervous and kept pleading for sleeping drugs—long after Dr. Cobb felt they were no longer necessary. Finally, Dr. Cobb had refused to give in to him.

And it wasn't simple insomnia, for Torey could go to sleep perfectly well

without medication, said Miss Foster. But he always seemed to have terrible nightmares when he slept without drugs. At least that's what they thought. He had called out several times in his sleep, muttered and cried out, and carried on the craziest sort of conversations. The next morning, he told Dr. Cobb some cock-and-bull story that he couldn't sleep any more without medicine. Cobb would give in to him for a while, but every time he would try to give up the sedatives, Torey would refuse to go to sleep.

"And, Doctor," Miss Foster confided to me, "he does the most outlandish things to keep himself awake. He has tried to cut himself with the silverware and burn himself with the hot food. He recites things out loud and when we try to quiet him down, he says he's got to keep himself awake." The nurse set her mouth grimly. If it was anybody else but Miss Foster, I knew she would have added: "He's crazy."

Later I asked Cobb if I might come around and be with Torey that evening. He complied with some joshing remarks warning me about spears and the twisted people.

THAT night I went in to see George Torey at about nine o'clock. He was ready for the night . . . at least as far as Belvedere Hospital was concerned, but certainly not as far as George Torey was concerned.

He was sitting bolt upright in bed with the determined look of a man who won't admit that night has come and it is time to rest . . . or who is afraid to admit it . . . for Torey had that same haunted look about him that had struck me on my first visit to him. Cobb came and I watched the argument between doctor and patient about sleeping drugs. Cobb was adamant. He would not go on giving sleeping drugs when there was no longer any reason for

their use. He turned to me for support on this point and I inclined my head in what I hoped was professional agreement, yet lacking in opposition to Torey. Miss Foster took Torey's pulse and filled his decanter of water. Foster and Cobb went out. The window was open and the April air was soft and good. A swell night for sleeping, I thought whimsically. And here before me was a man who wouldn't let himself sleep.

I had long ago discarded one of the theories that Dr. Cobb had advanced, namely, that Torey was, or was developing into a drug fiend. There didn't seem to be anything in his record to indicate this. His craving for sedatives was not as simple as all that.

I had been lost for a minute in my own contemplation of the case when Torey broke the silence.

"Dr. Manning," he whispered as though afraid he might be overheard, "will you please give me something to make me sleep?"

I smiled kindly at him.

"Dr. Cobb and I think you can do all right without anything, Mr. Torey," I admonished.

"I know . . . but you're wrong. For God's sake, Doctor, you've got to help me." Torey was getting into one of his emotional states, I thought professionally.

"Both your nurse and Dr. Cobb have told me that you have no difficulty in getting to sleep if you'll only let yourself . . ."

"That's the trouble," Torey broke in with an obvious effort to keep his voice steady. "My trouble is in keeping myself awake. I get so tired, so terribly tired, and I want to sleep. But I don't dare."

"Don't be childish, man. What's there to be afraid of in sleep? Why, on a night like this, it's great to sleep—unless you're a doctor and can only look forward to being wakened up by some patient with the

heebee-jeebies," I ended with an attempt at humor.

"You don't understand," Torey said mournfully.

"Well, try to make me. I told you once that I am a very good listener."

"You'll think I'm crazy. You'll think I'm absolutely out of my mind. And I'm not. Because I can prove it. I told these things to Dr. Cobb and he laughed at me. Oh, yes, he was very kind to me in the beginning. He said it was my accident and that I'd be all right after a few weeks here. But then when I tried to explain that what I am afraid of has nothing to do with the accident, he got out of patience with me and then he refused to give me my medicine and so I can't sleep. . . ." Torey sobbed like a child. I confess I felt sorry for him. . . .

I took a deep breath. "Does all this have something to do with the twisted little creatures and spears?"

He gasped when I said that and his face paled under the yellow light of the bed-lamp. "Dr. Cobb told you."

I nodded.

"And you think I'm crazy? Go on, you do, don't you. You're a psychiatrist, Doctor. You think you understand me. You think I've got a fixation on this sleeping business. Well, you're wrong and yet how can I show you without, without—" Torey sobbed again.

I REMAINED in my chair next the bed. It suggested itself to me that the only way to handle this man was to be harsh. "Look, Torey. Let's stop these games. Tell me what's going on. I want to hear the whole story. I'm tired of these hints. I want to hear the whole works. Now either you'll tell me or you won't. If you do, I'll try to help you. If you don't, I'll get out." I know this sounded pretty tough, but sometimes with a hysterical patient that is the only way to act.

Torey clenched and unclenched his fists for a few minutes and then murmured, "All right. I'll try and tell you, just as I've tried to tell the others. But how can you or they know. None of you has ever been there."

I pulled up closer to the bed and nodded reassuringly. I prompted "Let's go."

"I won't go into all my past history," started Torey, "because that has no bearing on what I'm going to tell you. I have nobody in the world but an uncle—at least I think I still have him (I noted this strange phraseology at the time). My father and mother died before I can even remember. I lived with my mother's brother. It was the only home I ever knew. He treated me well. He was eccentric, but brilliant in his field. Perhaps, Dr. Manning, you have heard of him. Allan Forter?"

The name clicked. Forter was one of those psychical researchers, those dabblers in occult manifestations, who is always coming up with strange ideas and experiments, some of which seem to be sheer quackery but others startling, brilliant, inexplicable.

Torey went on. "My uncle had one particular brain child. It was an invasion of a world that he believed was near us. Very near—and accessible to all of us. Perhaps if not by our physical bodies, then by our spiritual beings. . . ." Torey smiled, "Oh, yes, Uncle believed in the spiritual world far more than you doctors seem to."

"Anyway, this land is accessible at only one time. That time is nebulous, indefinite. And it is more than time. It is a state of mind, a place, a condition. It can most nearly be approximated when one is about to go to sleep." Torey looked at me eagerly.

I'm afraid I must have presented a pretty picture of almost bovine incomprehension. I didn't see what he was getting at.

"Go on," I urged, wrinkling my brow. "Where does this get us. I'm interested in you, and not your uncle."

Torey went on, "But, Doctor, that's just it. My uncle began to develop a theory giving a person the ability to slip a part of his spiritual being into this nether world between the sleeping and waking worlds. He believed in strange, exotic adventures there. He speculated on what could be done to project oneself into this world physically as well as psychically."

"Naturally I became excited. I tried too. I failed many, many times. I could not seem to develop the right conditions in myself and my environment."

"Well," I interrupted, "that's all very interesting but what has this got to do with you now?"

"Because, Doctor," Torey paused ominously, "where my uncle failed, I now have succeeded. I can project myself into this place, this land . . . and I wish to God I couldn't. For I am no longer able to lose this ability. To return to normal. And it is a ghastly place. It is inhabited by things and people that must be the accumulation from countless hideous nightmares of the ages."

And Torey, finishing, lay back awaiting some reply from me.

I found myself at a loss for words for a moment. Torey was staring at me, obviously expecting me to say something. I think he half expected me to laugh at him as the others had done. To myself I decided quickly that here was a man who needed my help. Whatever the ins or outs were, Torey was beset by a dreadful fear. It was up to me to help him.

I cleared my throat at last. "That's all very interesting. Can you tell me a little more about the way you are able to project yourself into this, this in-between land?"

Torey seemed relieved that I wasn't laughing at him. That is one of the first things a psychiatrist realizes. That no

matter how absurd the fear or fixation may seem to outsiders, it is very, very real to the sufferer.

As I think back on the scene in the bedroom that night, I can remember how eagerly George Torey leaned forward then. How eagerly he described in detail just what his uncle had attempted and what he himself had finally experienced. When he finished, I snapped a surreptitious glance at my watch and found it was nearly ten o'clock.

"Look, Torey," I suggested. "Suppose you go ahead and try to get some sleep. I'll stay right here with you for a while, if you'd like, and if you get these sensations or fears, why we'll take care of you. How about it?"

His face fell a bit then. I think my choice of the word "sensation" was unfortunate: He immediately took me to task. "Doctor, this isn't an idea. It isn't a feeling. It is a place. We are all susceptible to it."

HE WENT on almost desperately. "You, Doctor, how many times have you lain in bed at night and begun to drift off to sleep. You know that there is a moment—or call it what you will in terms of measuring time—a space or condition that is not wakefulness, yet is not sleep. People call it being 'half-awake' but they do not know just exactly what they mean. It is a commonplace, so nobody has ever given it any thought. But it is an experience that we have all had, maybe not consistently or often but at some time or another. You've experienced it yourself, Doctor."

I admitted, somewhat grudgingly. I am afraid, that I thought I knew what he meant. But I was perfectly satisfied with the casual phrase, "half-awake."

Torey was impatient now. Perhaps he had seen me look at my watch, and was afraid I'd leave him. He rushed on. "There is more to it than that. There are

many things that only need to be developed to become what we might call super-natural."

I admitted that he had something there. "Look here," I said. "We've talked long enough about this. You've interested me but now it's time for you to get some rest. After all, you want to get out of this hospital eventually, don't you? And at the rate you're going, well—" I ended my incomplete sentence with a laugh that was meant to be cheery. It echoed hollowly around the small hospital room. Torey's face was as funereal as the sound of that laugh.

"You win, Dr. Manning. But will you look in on me in a little while. Please promise me that. I'm so afraid that—"

I cut George Torey short by rising to my feet and crossing to the bed where I slapped him reassuringly on the arm. "You bet I will, Mr. Torey. Now you curl up and get some sleep. Let us take care of the spears."

Torey forced a sickly grin and turned on his side, his face to the wall. I turned his light out and tiptoed out of the room.

There is something very lonesome about a hospital at night. The empty, sound-proof halls are dreary tunnels of semi-darkness with only the light from the nurses' office reaching out to push back the dark. I paused long enough to say something to the white-capped girl in charge and then went to my quarters at the other end of the building for a smoke and some coffee. Belvedere Hospital is in a suburban district and at night is very quiet. There are no other big buildings near. I looked out my window at the darkness that surrounded the hospital like a high wall. The wind that came in my window as I stood there smoking was soft and soothing.

Frankly, I had to remind myself of my promise to Torey to look in on him a bit later in the evening to keep from fling-

ing myself down on my bed and going to sleep.

I picked up one of the latest medical journals and began to thumb aimlessly through the pages. But my mind kept going back to Allan Forte and his nephew upstairs. And I kept wondering about the nether land. I jokingly promised myself that I would try to project myself into it when I finally went to bed that night.

My watch showed nearly 11 p. m. when I left my room. One of the young internes on duty spoke as I passed: "A beautiful spring night, Dr. Manning." I nodded absently.

COMING to Torey's floor, I stopped in and spoke to the nurse again. She told me she had already looked in on Torey and everything seemed all right. I went down to his room, let myself in quietly and sat down in a chair near the bed. It was chilly and I lifted one of the extra blankets off a stool nearby, throwing it around my shoulders and then settled back again.

I chided myself a bit. I hadn't gone in for "night-watching" at a patient's bed since my interning days. Torey was on his side, face towards me, sound asleep. I don't know how long I sat there. I think the nurse looked in once, as Cobb had instructed her to do, and seeing me sitting there in the dark had gone away again. My actions must have amused her. Dr. Manning, young but moderately well-known psychiatrist, hovering near an insomniac's bedside like a Mother Hen.

Anyway, I went to sleep. And without stopping to dally in any nether land. I had had a hard day. I was tired. The next thing I knew something was beating into my mind. A sound, not too loud. But persistent, annoying. As I came fully awake I realized suddenly where I was and what the noise was. It was Torey. He was crying in his sleep. And on his

face, turned toward me, was the most inexplicably horrified look that I have ever seen.

I realized that here was a great chance for me to get some dope on just what was in his mind. And yet from the look on the man's face I knew he was suffering terribly, even if it were only a nightmare. I recalled my promise to him, "to protect him from sleep." And yet, I felt I must try to grasp what was going on, that here might be a tip on what had a hold of his mind.

Torey's face screwed in agony, his lips mouthing syllables I could not catch.

I bent nearer.

His breathing attracted my attention. It was rapid and shallow. I thought fleetingly of some physical crisis that might have come upon him. Pulling his arm out from under the covers, I reached for his pulse. It was rapid, very rapid, but of good quality. His hand was sweating, his arm, whole body in fact, bathed in sweat.

Every now and then I could hear him say something.

"No, no," he groaned. "For God's sake, don't, don't. I swear I'll stay away. I won't come back." His voice took on the quality of a scream and then died away again. Torey's body writhed as though in some great agony.

I had about made up my mind to give up all attempts to analyze from his sleeping attitude and talk the cause of his fear. I was on the verge of waking him when a thought struck me. Had Cobb actually seen this man in the throes of one of these night attacks? I felt it was my duty to call Cobb. Torey's thrashing and contortions were increasing. He was crying in a low voice, "No, no, oh God, don't, I won't ever come again. I swear I won't. I'll kill myself first."

And all the time he was wiggling and struggling as though fighting with somebody—or something. Absently, and in my

distraught frame of mind, I passed my hands over him. Of course I felt nothing. I was displeased with myself afterward. Dr. Manning trying to corral creatures from a dream world! Next I would be mixing love potions to sell to heartsick young maidens!

I went quickly to the door, determined to get the nurse to call Dr. Cobb immediately.

I looked back once over my shoulder at Torey as I started to leave. I didn't want my patient to strangle himself in the bedclothes. In the dimness of the room Torey was waving both arms now. Then he jerked several times, screwed himself up into a tight ball, his head and arms disappearing underneath the bedding. And at this moment Torey screamed. At the same time I thought I caught the shadow of a black something over the bed, over Torey. I recalled this later, in the light of what happened, although at the time I dismissed it as preposterous and a figment of my imagination. But I caught a glimpse of a black shaft, a greater blackness against the semi-blackness of the room, shaped almost like . . . a spear!

WHEN Torey screamed I turned back into the room. I rushed to his bed and snapped on his light. I flicked down the emergency switch signaling for the nurse on duty. And then I began to shake Torey gently.

On the third or fourth shake I noticed the blood. It soaked up through the sheet and blanket. I pulled down the clothing feverishly and gasped at the sight of Torey's arm. There was a deep gash, several inches long, on his right forearm. It was bleeding profusely. And there was something else about the wound that caused me to catch my breath. At the same instant I realized Torey was awake. He was looking at me with a crooked smile on his white, sweat-dampened face.

Triumph cut through the pain that showed in his expression as he said to me:

"Well, Doctor, you see, I was telling the truth. I have been *there* this time again."

The nurse arrived and I sent her for Dr. Cobb. One of the internes came in and applied a tourniquet. Ten minutes later, Dr. Cobb arrived. His grumpiness disappeared at the sight of Torey's wound.

"How did this happen?" he barked as he made his examination. The nurse and the interne told him what they could. Then I told him I would like to speak to him alone. The door closed behind the other members of the staff and Cobb turned to me with a worried scowl on his face.

"Well, what is all this about, Manning? Did he try to kill himself?"

I noticed Torey's contemptuous smile at that. Then I went into detail as much as I could. I told Cobb that I had looked in on Torey, and sat down in the room to watch, and dozed off. I told about my awakening and described Torey's actions completely.

"Humph," growled Cobb.

He quietly went about binding Torey's wound. I noticed that he had spent some time frowning down at the deep cut. Then he examined the bed table and the decanter. He worried over a rough edge he found on the metal frame of the bed table. "Might have done it," he mused half to himself.

My eyes went from Cobb to Torey. The patient seemed expectant. I thought I knew what was coming when he spoke. "Dr. Cobb, can I have some sleeping medicine?"

Cobb grunted and did not answer for a while. Then he turned to me. "What do you think, Dr. Manning?"

"Sure," I said. "I think Mr. Torey has earned that."

We both left the room then and after leaving instructions with the nurse, I ac-

companied Cobb down to the entrance, where he was about to get into his car and drive home to his cottage near the hospital.

"What do you think, Manning? Is he going insane—or is he insane?"

I shook my head slowly. "I don't think so, Dr. Cobb. It's not as simple as that."

Cobb grunted again. We were outside now. He had one hand on his car door.

"You know, Manning, a person doesn't get an injury like that from just nothing. Yet you describe his actions as convulsive before he sustained the injury. He might have injured himself on the point of the bed-table. That's the logical thought. When you weren't looking, of course."

I nodded noncommittally as Cobb got into his car and drove off. Back in my room I pondered. I knew Cobb was worried. I knew he had seen what I had. I knew from the way he had paused over Torey's wound. Paused and stared, just as I had when I first uncovered the cut arm. There is nothing in an immaculately clean hospital room that could make a ragged tear such as we both had seen. Nothing that would leave bits of earth and dirt and rust in that wound.

One thing hit me suddenly as I again stood by my window looking out into that long night. I remembered taking Torey's pulse. He was on his side and I reached for his right hand, bringing it out of the covers to find the pulse. There was no cut then. Yet a few moments later that same right forearm was dreadfully mangled.

This time when I got into bed I had no thoughts of trying to project myself in a "nether land." I was asleep inside of five minutes.

THE next morning I made it a point to drop in on Torey. He looked white, but not too much the worse for wear. His arm wasn't paining him much, he

said. I didn't have too much time to spend but I promised I would come back that afternoon. On my rounds I ran into Cobb.

He hadn't seen Torey. In the cold light of morning I think he felt a bit put out with the whole case.

"Anyway," said Cobb, "this is more in your realm than in mine. I'll take care of his arm but when a chap starts trying to take his life, I'm not the man for the problem."

I could see that Cobb, a tip-top medical man, had become provoked with his own inability to benefit Torey, when there was seemingly nothing the matter. And especially annoyed at last night's episode, for which we, neither of us, had reached a definite conclusion.

Cobb, I could further see, had decided to be adamant.

"I refuse to prescribe any more drugs for that man," he stated. "This drug fixation he has may be the whole trouble and I won't be a party to it."

I asked him what about relatives or friends? Did anybody ever come to see Torey? Cobb impatiently answered that as far as he knew nobody ever came, and no wonder.

As good as my word, that afternoon I dropped into Torey's room. He looked better. I think the poor chap was looking forward to another good night's sleep. I didn't have the heart to warn him that, going by Dr. Cobb's stern attitude in the hall, he wouldn't be getting any more sedatives.

We talked about this and that for longer than I realized. Torey's supper was brought in at six, and it was after that when I began to steer the conversation around to the previous night.

Torey seemed quite willing to talk. I think I had won his confidence and he looked to me to champion his side against Dr. Cobb, not realizing that, after all, I

was not in a professional position to do this, even if I so desired.

I asked him to try to describe to me just exactly what he had gone through last night.

Pathetically he asked me not to laugh at him and I assured him that after last night I had no intention of laughing at him at all.

"Go on," I said, leaning back in the chair. "Describe this adventure you had."

"I've told you that it comes on me when I go to sleep. Or as I am about to go to sleep. I lie there and I am awake and then suddenly I am not quite awake. I am in a transitional state. To most of us this is pleasant. It is unreal, a sort of drifting consciousness where we merge gradually into sleep."

"To certain persons this experience is a choice one. There is a quality of romance attached. It has an ethereal quality, that is far from life, yet is not sleep because it is so and not a dream."

I found some of this hard to follow, yet I think I knew what he meant. In psychiatry we recognize there is a twilight zone of consciousness that is not full sleep, yet is not consciousness. At times, it can be induced by a form of hypnosis. . . .

But Torey was continuing . . .

"Like dreams, this in-between land has its compelling realities. My uncle determined that it was an individual equation as to how real these adventures were. He believed that with the proper mental preparation and development these trips into this in-between land could become a reality."

"You mean that your uncle, Allan Porter, thought a person could actually disappear . . . ?" I interrupted incredulously.

Torey smiled. "The whole process is so complex that it is hard to explain. It is so complex that even my uncle did not fully understand what strange abilities he

had tried to develop in himself and succeeded in developing in me. Do you think these things could have happened to us, if, if we had known what hellish . . ." Torey broke off and looked at his arm with desperation.

I WAITED for him to continue, and then when he did not I asked him, "And has your uncle had experiences similar to the one you went through last night?"

Torey in his excitement ignored my question.

"Because they're wicked, don't you see? They're monsters and they resent our intrusion. They are devils and they'll kill us if they can," Torey was excited now. He went on soberly, "My uncle has been scared, too. He knows now just as I do that some day . . . Oh, God." Torey's voice broke off and the man had another fit of sobbing.

"Torey," I said briskly. "I'd like to bring your uncle here. I'd like to talk to him about things. You've given no name of kin on your chart. Don't you think you've kind of held out on us? After all, man, we want to get at the bottom of this, don't we?"

Torey looked at me squarely then. "Never," he said. "That would be the worst thing possible. My uncle can't help me. It would worry him sick if he thought this thing was killing me."

I thought this reasoning was a little weak and told him so.

Torey shook his head defiantly.

"But as a matter of form would you let me know his address. You can trust me, Torey. It's just that I'd like to have it. Suppose I promise not to use it unless you let me . . . or if . . ." I stopped.

Torey knew what was in my mind. He grinned. "You mean, Doctor, in case anything happens to me? That's what you mean. I'll do it on one condition."

"Okay. What's that? Anything reasonable and I'll promise."

"That if anything happens to me, you'll not tell Uncle about this. You'll tell him that I died as a result of the auto accident. You won't tell him one word about what I have told you."

I agreed lightly. Anything happening to Torey, outside of self-inflicted injuries, seemed ridiculous.

Torey said he would have the address in a sealed envelope when I came back that evening. . . . That was all right with me.

When I entered Torey's room that night I walked in on a stormy scene. Dr. Cobb had the center of the floor and I could hear his stern "nös" even before I opened the door. It was the same old story. Torey was pleading for drugs and Cobb was stubbornly refusing.

"And when I leave, please don't give in to this man and prescribe sleeping potions for him," Cobb warned me as he was leaving. I overlooked the remark. Cobb was all right. Only terribly flustered by this case he didn't understand. And I'll confess that I was pretty much in the same boat.

"Well, Torey, it looks as though you'll have to fight this thing out yourself," I said after we were alone.

Torey was silent for a moment and then handed me an envelope he'd had under the sheet. "That's my uncle's address."

He went on, "I'm terribly scared. I'm afraid of the night and of what's going to happen."

"Tell me what these creatures look like," I asked. "Your world, what sort of creatures people it?"

"They're monstrous and misshapen. They're evil and they hate. They are four-legged yet they walk like men. And they carry long, harpoon-like weapons," Torey finished listlessly.

"And your craving for drugs?" I asked.

"How do you figure drugs help? You know, Dr. Cobb, I'm afraid, thinks you're getting yourself into trouble with this craving for opiates. That's a serious disease in itself."

"If Cobb really knew, he'd be sure I was a dope fiend," almost cried Torey. "For months, even before my auto accident, I was afraid to sleep naturally—without drugs."

"For fear you couldn't sleep?" I was naive on purpose.

"For fear I could," answered the patient.

"For fear of what would happen to me when I did. No man knows what worlds impinge on our own in some distorted way. There are many things we none of us understand. The fictional idea of foreign dimensions is always so ludicrously jolly. There is an interchange of trinkets or some such ridiculousness patterned after the first white man seeking an Indian. But in reality, Doctor, perhaps these people in other spheres don't want us. Perhaps they have only the desire to repel an invader. Just as we would if some strange monster dropped out of the sky on this planet. My uncle and I delved into knowledge that should have been left alone. Through it I gained an ability that was unthinkable. But, again unlike fiction, we cannot smash the space machine, we cannot lose this ability; it is with us just as if we developed a muscle. It is with us until death." Torey's eyes were haunted.

Great Lord, the man believed every word he was saying. And even as my scientific mind murmured tommy-rot, I was swayed by his frenzied sincerity.

"But the other night," I bickered, "You went to sleep all right, you had these delusions at least an hour after you first went to sleep. Doesn't that kind of blast your ideas?"

"Don't you see, when I first slip into this

devil-land, I hide. They don't find me. It takes them time to realize I'm there. But when they do, they hunt for me ferociously. And I can only try to wake myself up, and you know what an impossible job that is. When I go to sleep normally, I drift into this land. . . ."

I WAVED my hand at him, "I've heard all that, Torey. I'll admit that the accident last night was quite shocking. But there must have been some logical explanation."

"Please, Dr. Manning, don't be out of patience with me. I've tried to tell you the truth about things as best I can. Please, Doctor, don't ask me to face another night without medicine."

"Cobb is right," I spoke out harshly. "You're talking like a trembling coward who's got to have his ration of dope."

"I can't explain it," admitted Torey unhappily. "But isn't it true that a certain type of drug paralyzes certain sections of the brain?"

"I know," I said impatiently, "all that is true."

"Well, don't you see, don't you see that then a portion of my brain is anesthetized . . . and, if that portion is the part that has gotten my uncle and me into trouble. . . ?"

"Mr. Torey, you're talking like an emotional fool," I said, and rose and started to leave the room.

"It isn't I who am the fool, Doctor," Torey said in a sober voice.

I regretted my harshness with him and turned back with a smile.

"Look, Mr. Torey. Try to put these things out of your mind and get some sleep. Suggest to yourself that you will sleep and that you will have dreamless sleep. Suggest to yourself that there is nothing to be afraid of."

Torey smiled wanly as I walked again toward the door. "And you won't give me anything, Doctor?"

"I can't. Don't you see, it's Cobb's orders."

"Well, then, I can't sleep. I'll have to keep myself awake."

I shook my head impatiently. "That's up to you. I'd advise you to try to get over this silly notion." I went out of the room.

Not twenty minutes later I was summoned by a call. When I got to Torey's floor the nurse told me that Torey had tried to stab himself with his drinking glass after first splintering it against the side of the bed. We took all other glassware out of the room then and I even had Miss Foster look through the bed to see there were no secreted fragments or instruments of any sort.

Torey seemed very low then. He again pleaded with me to please give him some sedative. I went out of the room without speaking to him. Out in the hall I decided that I should call Cobb.

My gruff colleague was as stern as ever. Then he hit on an idea. "Manning," he suggested, "You and I know this thing is mental. Give him a couple of sodium chloride capsules and tell him that it's a sleeping medication."

As a general thing I dislike giving "fake" medicine but under the circumstances, it seemed allowable. With as straight a face as I could muster, I administered a couple of sodium chloride capsules to Torey, assuring him that I believed they would be perfectly adequate.

Torey was pathetically grateful and clutched my arm in thanks.

I'm afraid I beat a rather ungraceful retreat from his room after saying a hurried good night. My conscience bothered me a bit, but after leaving instructions with the floor nurse that I was to be called if anything happened, I went to my room.

SOMETIME in the night I woke up as a blood-curdling shriek rang out through the hospital. I was up and half-dressed

before my buzzer sounded imperatively. I knew without an extra thought just where I was needed.

When I got to Torey's room, I found an interne and Miss Foster in the room. In the center, half in and half out of bed was Torey. The yellow light seemed dim and unreal as I hurried in. As the young interne turned toward me, his face was a sickly color.

His mouth formed syllables I couldn't hear, and he nodded toward the bed. Without seeing exactly what was wrong I knew instinctively something terrible had happened.

"Get Dr. Cobb on the phone," I ordered Miss Foster crisply. She turned and went almost as though in a dream. I came to the bedside and looked down. Torey was twisted horribly, and through the very middle of him, right clean through—I shuddered involuntarily—was a jagged, torn hole that had been driven through the blanket, the sheet, Torey, and the mattress as though with superhuman strength.

The interne wet his lips finally and spoke. "How could it have happened?"

I shook my head dazedly. Miss Foster came in and said other patients were upset. I dismissed the interne to try and quiet them.

I sat down to try and think. Finally Cobb arrived. He dismissed the interne and Miss Foster and then made a silent and minute examination of the body and of the room.

Finally he turned a white, strained face to me. "It is as though somebody did drive a spear clean through him . . . and then pulled it out. Anybody in here?"

I shook my head. "No, Miss Foster says she heard the scream. . . ."

Cobb looked the room over again. Then he turned to me and his face was bleak. "Manning, you looked at this wound?" He barely noted my nod and went on. "We know nobody could have crept in here and

harpooned Torey without being seen even if somebody wanted to. . . ."

I nodded again.

"How could this have happened?"

I shook my head. "I don't know."

Cobb took a breath, "I know what you're thinking . . . about Torey's strange ideas and stories, but it can't be, I tell you. The wound was self-inflicted, somehow. It must have been. Nobody was in this room."

I looked up, "Doctor, you noticed the same characteristics this time as last night? The dirt, the earth and rust in the wound?"

Cobb nodded. "But these things are insanity to ponder over. It is possible that he tried to get out of bed and fell against this chair. Let us say he had somehow overturned the chair, the leg could have gone right through him." Cobb looked at me pathetically, almost hopefully.

"Anyway," he went on, "there is to be no talk about this. We did all we could. Our consciences are clear. I shall announce that he met death as the result of an accident caused by an epileptic convulsion."

I nodded numbly. What else was there to do.

It is amazing how easy it is to substitute a fictitious but logical explanation for a truthful but impossible one. Dr. Cobb told the interne and Miss Foster just what our conclusions were. After all Miss Foster had found Torey in a strange position half in and half out of bed. He *could* have upset the chair close to the bed while moving around in his sleep, then fallen onto it. The tears in the bed itself were—hushed up.

THE next day I remembered the envelope Torey had given me. I found Mr. Forter lived in a town not more than a few hundred miles away from Belvedere Hospital. I sent an urgent telegram requesting him to come and telling him of his nephew's death.

Allan Forter arrived the following after-

noon of a black, rainy day. I met him downstairs. Forte was an unprepossessing little man; thin and worn-looking with worry and fatigue etched on his face. I introduced him to Cobb. He shook his head sadly as we explained the details. He seemed genuinely fond of his nephew.

After Cobb had left us Forter turned to me, "Tell me, Doctor. Did you ever notice anything strange about George? He was, shall I say, a rather nervous young man." I noted the anxiety in Forter's voice.

I shook my head slowly. "No. He was an intelligent chap and we all thought he was coming along well. But after these bad smash-ups—sometimes you can't always tell."

"I'm sorry my nephew never sent for me when this happened," said Forter. As he spoke he lifted his hand to scratch his head wistfully. "I would like to have been with him."

As we walked downstairs, Forter thanked me for my services and added that he would make all arrangements.

"Dr. Cobb said you were a psychiatrist, I believe," Forter said.

I explained hastily, "We thought Mr. Torey was pretty unnerved by his auto accident. He needed a bit of help along those lines. I'm terribly sorry we weren't able to pull him through."

Forter nodded thoughtfully, "He never spoke strangely to you, Doctor?"

"No," I lied nobly, "Strangely, in what way?"

We were now at the hospital entrance. "Oh, nothing," laughed Forter and I could see he seemed relieved: "I guess I'm the one to need a psychiatrist."

"What's your trouble," I said casually in the conventional attempt at lightness.

Forter was outside now, a small, frail figure against a backdrop of rain and darkness. His face was drawn and weary.

"My trouble," he half-mused, "Why, I can't sleep."