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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Watcher in the Green Room

By HUGH B. CAVE

A gripping story of the weird doom that befell a man who had murdered his wife



"It was getting ready to attack him."

THE plump, stumpy man in the double-breasted gray coat was quite obviously drunk. He walked with an exaggerated shuffle which carried him perilously close to the edge of the high curbing, whereupon he stopped short, drew his fat hands from their respective pockets, and gravely regarded the drooling gutter beneath him. Proceeding sluggishly in this manner, he successfully navigated three blocks of gleam-

ing sidewalk, turned left into Peterboro Street, and arrived before a red-brick apartment building whose square front frowned down upon him with disapproving solemnity.

He stood staring, apparently unaware that the hour was midnight and that the rain which had fallen steadily since early evening had made of him a drenched, dishevelled street-walker. Before him, as he stood thus contemplating the wide en-

trance, the door opened and a man and a woman descended the stone steps. They gazed at him queerly. The man spoke.

"Drunk again, Kolitt?"

"Still," the drunken one replied, grinning.

"You'd better let Frank help you," the woman advised. "You'll be invading the wrong apartment again."

The plump man raised one hand up and out in a clumsy salute.

"A camel," he said, "never forgets."

The man and woman hesitated. In an undertone the man muttered:

"Poor devil! It's too bad. I suppose it's the easiest way to forget."

The drunken one did not hear. He grinned idiotically as the man and woman went their way, leaving him to ascend the steps alone. In the lobby he groped in the pockets of his coat and produced a key-ring. Mechanically he thrust two fingers into the brass mail-box marked ANTHONY KOLITT. Then, opening the heavy inner door with a key proportionately large, he marched down the corridor, climbed two flights of rubber-carpeted stairs, and let himself into apartment number thirty-one.

"Five days gone," he mumbled, closing the door behind him. "If they haven't found out by now, they never will."

The thought sobered him, but he was still drunk enough to fumble awkwardly for the light-switch. The bright light blinded him. Blinking, he groped down the short hall to the living-room and lowered himself heavily, coat and all, into an overstuffed chair close to the radio. Reaching out, he lit the lamp on the end-table beside him; then he stretched himself, relaxed, and gazed intently at a large gray photograph which stared at him serenely from atop the radio.

The photograph was of a woman—attractive, straight-haired, somber-eyed, per-

haps thirty years of age. It stood formally in a square silver frame, bare of ornamentation or inscription. The plump man studied it without emotion, as if he had studied it precisely the same way a great many times before. Presently he rose, removed his wet garments and shoes, and walked near-naked into the adjoining room. When he returned, he held a bottle and glass in his hands. He filled the glass, raised it toward the photograph, and said quietly:

"Pleasant dreams."

Then he turned out the light and paced unsteadily into the bedroom.

The bedroom was small and square, boasting a wooden three-quarter bed, a squat table, a massive old-fashioned bureau, and a single yellow-curtained window. The plump man sat on the bed and removed his socks. He stared at the bureau, grinned cruelly, and said:

"Too big, eh? Old style, is it? Well, it's a good thing it *was* big; otherwise you'd be kind of cramped for room, sweetheart. For once you won't complain, eh?"

The bed was unmade. He climbed into it and shaped the pillow with his fists, then lay on his back and gazed at the ceiling. The room was not quite dark. Its single window was high above the street outside and level with the roof of a building across the way. The wet window-pane exuded a green glow, reflecting the pale glare of a neon sign on the near-by roof. The glow was pleasant; the plump man enjoyed looking at it. It made fantastic, green-edged shapes on the walls of the room and transformed the huge bureau in the corner into a monstrous four-legged beast. He liked the beast. It was something to talk to.

"So you got her at last, eh?" he said drunkenly. "Ate her right up and swallowed her." His laugh was a low gurgle. "Serves her right, that does, for getting

silly notions. She'd have found fault with anything, *she* would! I'm glad you got her—glad your insides were big enough to hold her. Yes, sir, that's poetic justice."

The bureau was half in shadow. Even the visible portions of it were shadowed, ill-defined, so that no separate details were distinct. It was more massive than usual tonight, because the green light was dimmed by the drizzling rain. Last night, when there had been no rain, the hulk had been a huge, staring hound. The night before that it had been a fantastic horse with many malformed heads. Well, there was nothing strange about that. Almost any object of furniture could assume changing shapes in semidarkness. The extent of the shapes depended entirely on the strength of the observer's imagination.

The plump man chuckled to himself. *He* had a good enough imagination. It had come in handy, too, not so very long ago. And right now it was a blessing. It kept him from thinking too much about certain unpleasant things which had occurred recently.

He studied the bureau lazily. It had assumed a different shape tonight, probably because of the rain. It had eyes, several of them—they were the protruding knobs on the drawers. It had thick, misshapen legs, too, and a bloated torso. What would Bellini, the goggle-eyed chap downstairs, say to that? Most likely he'd look with wide eyes, and shudder, and whisper warnings in his thin, womanish voice. Bellini was like a lot of other superstitious fools; he made too much out of nothing. Sentimental idiot! If he *knew* what that bureau contained, he'd run screaming back to his stuffy apartment at the back of the building, and hide himself there!

"Well, he won't know," the plump man said indifferently. "That's our secret, eh, old boy? When we move out of

here in a few days more, we'll take it with us. *Then* let 'em learn the truth, if they can!"

Still drunk, he saluted the bulging shape in the corner. Then he dragged the bedclothes around him and hunched his knees into his stomach, and went to sleep.

PALE sunlight was streaking the walls of the room when he woke. He lay motionless many minutes, aware that his mouth was dry and swollen and his head aching. Some day, he reflected wearily, somebody would discover a way to take the hangover out of hard liquor.

He put both hands to his forehead and pressed hard, then rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms. What time was it? About ten o'clock, probably; it was hard to tell, because the sunlight in the room was so feeble.

Stiffly he climbed out of bed and groped for a pair of slippers, then scuffed noisily into the kitchenette and opened the ice-box door. While he was thumbing the cork out of a gin bottle, the door at the end of the hall rattled. Scowling, he paced back along the corridor and fumbled with the knob.

"Who is it?"

"Me. Welks," said the man outside.

The plump man opened the door slowly and stood there with the gin bottle dangling in his fist. The other man—the same who had offered to assist him last night—said hesitantly:

"Thought I'd see if everything was all right, Kolitt. You were in pretty bad shape last night."

"I was drunk, eh?"

"You weren't exactly sober."

The plump one scowled, then stepped aside, grinning.

"Come in. Have a drink," he said.

"'Scuse the attire. I just got up."

He closed the door and led his visitor

down the hall, then motioned the man to a chair and went into the kitchen for two glasses. Returning, he said:

"I guess your wife was shocked, eh?"

"Not at all." The other man accepted the full glass and turned it idly in his fingers. He seemed unsure of himself. "She knows what you're going through. We all do. Can't blame a chap for hitting the bottle under such circumstances." He hesitated, stared at the plump man's bleary eyes. "But aren't you overdoing it, Kolitt? What'll your wife say when she does come back?"

"She won't come back."

"Why so sure?"

"I'm no fool." He upended the glass in his mouth and swallowed noisily. "When a man's wife walks out on him, Welks, there's a reason. She doesn't just go for a hike."

"You mean there's another man?"

"If there is, good luck to him."

"You're taking it hard, old boy."

"I'm no fool," Anthony Kolitt repeated. "When a man comes home and finds his wife's clothes and her bags gone, and the house empty, and a good-bye note on the bureau . . . You asked me yesterday why I didn't notify the police and have them find her. That's why."

The man named Welks put down his glass and stood erect.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "I didn't know."

He paced into the hall, stopped, turned again.

"Anything I can do——" he mumbled.

He closed the hall door after him.

Anthony Kolitt poured himself another drink. A little while later he put on a lavender dressing-gown and paced to the door. Stooping, he picked up the morning paper, then returned to the living-room, sat in the overstuffed chair, placed the gin bottle, a glass, and a pack of cig-

arettes within reach on the smoke-stand, and leisurely began to read the sporting pages.

HE WAS quite drunk again when Mr. Cesare Bellini, from downstairs, called upon him two hours later; so drunk, in fact, that he shook Bellini's hand warmly and said with a large grin:

"Well, well! Come right in!"

Mr. Bellini was not usually welcome. He was a tall, painfully slender young man with ascetic features and untrimmed raven hair. He was a student—though what particular kind of student he was, Anthony Kolitt had never troubled to find out. Mr. Bellini was one of those "queer, artistic" chaps. It was believed that he gave readings, or something of the sort, to people who came professionally to see him.

"I have come to see if there is anything, no matter how insignificant, I can do for you," he said jerkily.

He sat stiffly in a straight-backed chair, leaning forward toward Anthony Kolitt with his lean hands flat upon his knees. His trousers needed pressing, Mr. Kolitt observed. He also needed instructions on how to knot a necktie. The one acceptable thing about him was the pale blue silk handkerchief protruding from his breast pocket; it gave him an almost feminine air of daintiness.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Kolitt shrugged. "You think you can find *her* for me?"

"If I could," Bellini murmured, "I would."

"Well, why can't you? You're a spiritualist or something, aren't you?"

"A spiritualist? No, no. I am not that, Mr. Kolitt."

"Well, what about the people who come to see you? They come to get read-

ings, and that sort of business, don't they?"

"No. You are mistaken. They come for advice. They come with troubles in their hearts. Me, I look in their minds and tell them what they should do."

"Oh. You're a psychologist, eh?" Mr. Kolitt grinned.

"Psychopathist, rather, Mr. Kolitt."

"Well," Mr. Kolitt said drunkenly, "go ahead. Do your stuff. I'm drunk; I ought to be easy."

"It is a strange thing, drink," Bellini murmured, moving his head sideways over its protruding Adam's apple. "Some men, they drink to celebrate. They are happy; they wish to be happier. Others drink like you, to forget a sadness. You are lonely, no?"

"Oh, I got a pal," Mr. Kolitt declared warmly.

"A pal? Here?"

"Right in the next room, young feller. Come along." He stood up, swaying in an attempt to balance himself. "I'll show you."

Bellini did not understand. He frowned, and the frown darkened his already dark eyes and bunched his brows together over his hooked nose. He suspected, apparently, that Mr. Kolitt's pal was an ephemeral being born of gin fumes. Silently he followed Mr. Kolitt into the bedroom.

"There," said Mr. Kolitt, pointing.

"But I see nothing."

"Not now you don't. Of course not. It's only there at night."

"At night?" Bellini frowned. "I am afraid I do not——"

"Then let me explain, and you *will* understand."

Mr. Kolitt sat importantly on the unmade bed and hooked the heels of his slippers on the wooden bed-frame. Folding his arms around his upthrust knees, he grinned into his guest's face and hic-

cuped noisily. Then, without haste, he slyly proceeded to inform the thin young man of the nightly visitor which, created by a combination of green light, shadow, and applied imagination, emanated from the massive bureau in the corner. And, having finished this prolonged dissertation, he released his knees and sprawled back upon the bed, expecting to be amused no end by Bellini's outburst of horror.

The outburst was not forthcoming. Bellini peered at him thoughtfully a moment, as if wondering how much of the speech could justly be attributed to a belly full of liquor. He then turned and studied the window, the bureau, and the respective arrangement of each to the other. Finally he said, frowning:

"That is a most dangerous game, my friend."

Mr. Kolitt was disappointed. Obviously so. He sat up, blinking. He said petulantly:

"Eh? Dangerous?"

"You are—how do you say it?—flirting with fire," Bellini declared.

"You mean I'll be scaring myself?"

"Perhaps. But it is not so simple. This thing which you are making out of nothing—this monster which is one night a large dog, and another night a many-headed horse, and another night a horrific portent unlike any named beast—it is, perhaps, only a thing of lights and shadows, as you have told me. But you are playing foolishly with profound metaphysics, my friend. With ontology. With the essence of all being. You are a blind man, walking treacherous ways of darkness."

"Eh?" Mr. Kolitt said again. "I'm what?"

"You are a fool," Bellini said simply. "You do not comprehend. The imagination, it is a powerful force. It is a pro-

ductive faculty, seeking everywhere for truth. If there is no truth, it creates truth. This thing you are creating for your amusement, it is unreal, perhaps. But if you are too persistent, you will make it real."

"Sure," Mr. Kolitt agreed pleasantly. "Then I could get it drunk, like me, eh? We'd be pals."

"Very well. It is good to joke, my friend. It is good to be unafraid. That is because you do not understand. Yesterday a woman came to me and said: 'I had a dream, and in my dream my son came to me and bent over me and spoke to me. How is that? He is dead. Can the dead return?' And I said to her: 'Yes, the dead do sometimes return. But the man who came to you was a real man. You created him by thinking of him. He spoke the words you, yourself, put into his mouth. If you had willed him to kiss you, he would have kissed you.' That is what I told her, and it is true. The same is true with you. When you create this strange portent in your mind, it is a reality. It is what you make it. It does what you will it."

"Suppose I willed it to get me a drink," Mr. Kolitt murmured gently.

"Very well. You are making a fool of me. I will go. But *you* are the fool, my friend. You are toying with the very essence of life. I hope you are not so drunk one night that you mistake life for death."

Apparently it was not difficult to anger Bellini's Latin temperament. His dark eyes burned. He turned deliberately and stared at the huge bureau.

"If I were you," he said bluntly, "I would move that where lights and shadows and your fertile imagination"—he spoke the word with significant emphasis—"would no longer transform it into something other than what it is. Good day, my friend."

Mr. Kolitt swayed forward, protesting.

"Now wait a minute. I didn't mean to poke fun at you. I——"

"Good day," Bellini repeated coldly. "I do not enjoy being made the idiot. To a man so drunk as you, all wisdom is a waste of time. I will come again, perhaps, when you are more sober."

The hall door clicked shut behind him.

Mr. Kolitt sat on the bed, blinked foolishly at the bureau a moment, and said gravely:

"Now see what you've done. You've scared the nice man away."

MR. KOLITT was neither drunk nor quite sober when he let himself into his apartment that night. He had spent most of the evening at the theater around the corner, and the offering there had been unpleasantly sinister. The silver screen, reflected Mr. Kolitt, was a peril sadly in need of censorship. It should be against the law to show certain pictures to certain people. Tonight's presentation had made him shudder.

He did not recall the name of the picture, but the majority of its scenes had been of a strikingly weird nature. One in particular was so vivid in his mind, even now, that it made him uneasy.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "I can see it yet, that damned thing!"

The thing which bothered him had been a monster; a manufactured monster, to be sure—created by experts out of immense sheets of rubberized cloth and animated by internal gears and levers—but horrible, nevertheless. He had visions of it advancing toward him, as it had advanced upon the unfortunate villain in the picture. Such things, he decided, should be outlawed.

The hour, now, was eleven o'clock. After leaving the theater, he had visited the Business Men's Club and vainly at-

tempted to drive away his morbidity by batting a small white ping-pong ball across a table in the game-room. Tiring of that, he had won seven dollars playing poker, and had spent the seven dollars on a quart of excellent rye whisky. He needed the whisky. It would steady his nerves. For the past several days his nerves had needed constant attention and lubrication.

He took the bottle from his pocket and placed it gently on the radio, beside his wife's photograph. Methodically he removed his tie, shirt, trousers, and shoes, and went to the bedroom for his dressing-gown. Then he turned on the radio and sat in the overstuffed chair, with a book in his lap.

He opened the book. It was a mystery story. He liked mystery stories. This one would take his mind off his own troubles and make him forget himself. He reached for the bottle and looked about for a glass. Finding none, he shrugged his hunched-up shoulders and upended the bottle in his mouth, drinking noisily. Then, grinning, he began to read.

Reading, he became aware presently that the dance music emanating from the radio had become something less pleasant. Voices rasped at him. He listened a moment, scowling, then leaned forward abruptly to turn the dial; but instead of turning it, he listened again. It was one of those things you just had to listen to. There was a sound of wind howling, and rain beating eerily against shut windows. There were voices whispering. The voices ceased. Into the strange silence came the ominous tread of slow footsteps: clump . . . clump . . . clump . . .

Mr. Kolitt grunted and turned the radio off. He leaned back in his chair, trembling. For a while he stared with wide eyes at the photograph of his wife; then, with an obvious effort, he focused his at-

tention on the book in his lap. Before he had read half a page more, he snapped the book shut and dropped it on the floor.

"Damnation!" he said. "Everywhere I turn there's murder and horror! There ought to be a law against such things! It's uncivilized!"

He stood up and drank deeply from the bottle. Snarling, he strode into the bedroom and switched on the light. His gaze wandered to the bureau in the corner. He said viciously:

"Blast him and his big talk! It's his fault! He's the one who started this business!"

He was thinking of Bellini. Bellini's smoldering eyes and deliberate words plagued him.

The single window was again wet with rain, and its drooling glass winked with many green eyes, derisively. The glass was pretty, Mr. Kolitt thought. It was like a large, moving tray in a jeweler's store. Each green-edged drop of water was a tiny precious emerald.

"And I suppose if I sat down and imagined 'em to be emeralds," he grunted, "they'd *be* emeralds. Yes they would not!"

He smiled crookedly then, as if relieved at thus finding a flaw in Bellini's reasoning. Quietly he removed the rest of his clothes and went to the bureau. Opening the top drawer, he took out clean pajamas; then he looked down at the lower drawers and tapped the bottom one with his naked foot.

"Comfortable?" he said quietly.

He unfolded the pajamas. They were green, with white stripes. Methodically he got into them and stood idly before the bureau, his elbows angling outward as he buttoned the green jacket-front. The room was warm. Frowning, he walked to the radiator and turned the small handle on the side of it. Then he stood at the window, looking out. Across the

way, the green neon sign was like giant handwriting in the drizzle.

"Tonight's the last night I'll be looking at you," he said. "We're moving out of here tomorrow—me and the hope chest here." He turned his head drunkenly to peer at the bureau. "Yep. It's safe enough for us to clear out now. The neighbors won't be suspicious. They'll think I'm just a poor lonely devil trying to forget."

He was aware suddenly that the odor of his own breath, tainted with liquor fumes, was not the only odor in the room. There was another smell, less pleasant and more significant—a sour emanation suggesting decay, as of spoiled meat. Eyes narrowed and lips puckered slightly, he strode quickly to the bureau and stooped to bring his nostrils close to the lower drawers. When he straightened again he stood staring, his hands pressing hard against his hips.

"We'll be leaving tomorrow, all right," he muttered. "It won't be too soon, at that. I'll have to burn incense in here before the moving-men come."

He went into the living-room, then, and took the bottle he had left there on the smoke-stand. Quietly he turned out the light, and the hall light, too, and paced back to the bedroom. He opened the window six inches at the bottom, to let out that offensive odor. Then he went to bed.

He did not sleep. The room was too warm, and that unpleasant smell of pollution was too much in evidence. He lay with his thoughts, and they were morbid thoughts, parading rapidly across the bed. First marched the memories of that night not so long ago, when he had knelt on the floor of this very room, with a keen-edged kitchen-knife in one hand and a hack-saw . . . but it was better to forget those things. Then came the neighbors, finding him drunk, asking him questions, offering their sympathies. "Oh, but she'll

come back, Mr. Kolitt! Women are strange creatures. They do strange things, but they are just women after all. She'll come back." And again: "Don't worry, old boy. She hasn't walked out on you for good. We all have our little family troubles. You and she—well, you've been going it pretty hot and heavy for quite a while. We've all known it. But she'll get over it."

And then Bellini. Damn Bellini!

Mr. Kolitt drained the contents of his bottle and leaned over to place the empty container on the floor. He lay back, enjoying the pleasant sensation of warmth that crept through him as the liquor found its way into his internals. Bellini was a superstitious young idiot, nothing else! His ideas were soap-bubbles filled with hot air. How could you bring something to life just by imagining it?

He turned suddenly on his side and peered at the bureau. The room was darker than usual, because the rain outside was a cold rain, and the combination of cold outside and warmth inside had fogged the window-pane. The huge bureau in the corner was a mastodonic shape of gloom, cloaked at one end in a winding-sheet of changing green light. It was neither hound nor horse tonight, Mr. Kolitt reflected. It was merely a swollen hulk with protruding eyes. What would Bellini say to that?

"Well, I won't look at the damned thing," he thought drunkenly. "I'll pack off to sleep and forget it."

But he looked, because the thing was fixed firmly in his mind, and his eyes refused to remain closed. Again and again he cursed himself for looking; but when he was not looking he was wondering what new shape the thing in the corner had assumed, and then his eyes opened again to find out.

This was foolish, too, because the thing

had not changed shape since he had first peered at it. It was still a huge, bloated monstrosity with short, stumpy protuberances for legs, and a balloon-like excrescence for a head. "Like the thing in the movies tonight," he thought suddenly, and shuddered.

The thing in the movies had been a gigantic abhorrence supposedly called into being by obscene incantations. In the end, it had deliberately and awfully devoured its creator. Recalling those things, Mr. Kolitt gazed with renewed interest at the similar monster in his own room; then he shut his eyes and mumbled aloud:

"Ugh! I'll be giving myself D.T.s!"

FOR a while, this time, he succeeded in keeping his eyes closed, but he did not sleep. His thoughts were too vivid and his mind too alert to permit sleep. He wanted a drink, but was secretly glad that the bottle was empty. He had already drunk too much. The liquor was keeping him awake instead of making him drowsy. It was keeping alive the unpleasant parade of thoughts which persisted in marching through his mind. Especially was it keeping alive that annoying vision of Bellini, and the words that went with it.

Again Mr. Kolitt looked at the monster, and again shuddered violently.

"My God!" he muttered aloud. "I'd hate to bring *you* to life!"

The thought, expressed thus in blunt syllables, alarmed him infinitely more than when he had kept it to himself. He wanted all at once to recall it, lest the monster should take it seriously and heed the suggestion. He wanted, too, to get out of bed and turn on the light, thereby transforming the monster into its original form. But the light-switch was terrifyingly far away, and to reach it he would have to pass within a yard of the beast's bloated head.

There were several other things he wanted to do, too. He wanted to shriek at the thing to stop glaring at him, and he wanted to go into the next room and look at the clock, to see how long it would be before daylight filtered through the green-glowing window. Fearfully he considered the wisdom of tiptoeing to the window and drawing the shade, to shut out that green glare; but if he did that, the room would be in total darkness, and the horror would still be there even though invisible.

He no longer thought about Bellini, or about the other thing which lay in the bureau's lower drawers. He thought only of himself, and of his increasing terror. It was foolish terror, he knew. It was the result of going to the wrong kind of a movie, and listening to a mystery play on the radio, and reading a weird detective story, and guzzling too much liquor. But those things were done now, and could not be amended. And the monster was here, threatening him.

"But it's only wood," he mumbled. "It's not real."

If he got up and walked toward it, and touched it, his fear would be gone and he would be laughing at himself for being a drunken fool. That would be the end of *that*, and he could turn on the light and go to sleep in security. But if the thing *were* real—if it were not made of wood—and he walked toward it—

Another thought came then, and caused him to cringe back into the wall. *She* had sent it. She had created it, just as the man in the movies had created *his* monster. The thing hated him for what he had done to her. It meant to kill him.

He lay rigid, staring at it. Yes, it was moving, and it was moving of its own accord—not because of the mist on the window-pane. Its hideous head was swaying from side to side, not much, but enough

to be noticeable. Its small eyes were glaring maliciously. It was getting ready to attack him.

The blood ebbed from Mr. Kolitt's face. Slowly, with caution born of the fear which ate voraciously into him, he drew aside, inch by inch, the bed-clothes which covered him. Fearfully he wormed his legs toward the edge of the bed, and lowered them until his bare feet touched the floor. Not once did his wide eyes blink or his fixed gaze leave the greenish shape in the corner. If he could reach the threshold and slam the door shut behind him, there might be a possibility of escape. The hall door was but a few strides distant, and once in the hall he could run with all his might, shouting for help.

Warily he rose to a sitting position and put his hands behind him, pushing himself up. An eternity passed while his trembling body straightened and stood erect. Then he hesitated again, stifling the groan that welled to his lips.

The thing was eyeing him malevolently. It was not a creature of his imagination. It was real; he knew it was real. Its horrible head had stopped swaying; its bloated, swollen body was slowly expanding and contracting. It was waiting—waiting for him to make the first move. If he attempted to escape, if he took a single forward step, it would fall upon him.

Frantically he wrenched his gaze away from it and glanced toward the doorway. The door was open. His only chance lay in that direction. If he waited any longer—

He hurled himself forward. Three steps he took, and on the fourth he stood rigid, paralyzed by the sucking, scraping sound which rose behind him. He turned, terrified, and the thing seized him as he recoiled from it. The impact flung him

to the floor. For a single horrific instant he stared up into the loathsome, undulating countenance above him. A scream jangled from his throat. Then his eyes and nose and mouth were smothered under an emanation of putrescent vileness, and that cavernous maw engulfed him.

EIGHT hours later the janitor discovered him there. The janitor, a red-faced, large-stomached Swede of more than middle age, shuffled past Mr. Kolitt's door with a garbage pail in his one hand and a mound of newspapers in his other. He had reached the mid-point in his daily round of collections. He wondered why Mr. Kolitt had failed to put out a wastebasket. Then he became aware of a most unpleasant and nauseating odor which filled the corridor. And, because the stench seemed to emanate from Mr. Kolitt's apartment, he knocked on Mr. Kolitt's door.

A moment later he let himself in with his own key.

He found Mr. Kolitt in the bedroom, midway between bed and doorway. Mr. Kolitt was dead. His legs and torso lay in a pool of dark red blood, and the entire upper portion of his plump body had been devoured. Those parts of him which remained were shapeless and unrecognizable beneath a pall of viscous green slime; and this foul excrescence, whose unbearable stench had first attracted the janitor's attention, extended from Mr. Kolitt's mutilated body to the bedroom window, where the sill was likewise coated with it.

These things the janitor saw and at first failed to assimilate. Unable to comprehend such horror, he merely stood staring. Then, believing his eyes at last, he shouted incoherent words in a guttural voice and leaned back against the wall, retching.

Later, a sober-faced Frenchwoman,

who was a modiste, sat in Mr. Kolitt's living-room and said to the policemen who were questioning her:

"I have told you all I know. There I was, sitting in my apartment across the court from this one, and I heard a man screaming. I put down my needle and thread and hurried to the window, and I saw the thing coming out of this man's window. I do not know what it was. There was rain falling, and I saw only what the green light from the advertising sign showed me. It was large and it was greenish; that is all I am sure of. So large was it that it seemed to fold together as it flowed over his window-sill, and then stretched itself out like a big fat slug when it crawled over the edge of the roof up above. That is all I know."

"But what in thunder *was* it?" one of the policemen demanded irritably.

Mr. Bellini, the ascetic-faced young man from downstairs, said quietly: "If you will come again into the bedroom, gentlemen, I will show you what it was." And when they had followed him there, he pointed unemotionally to the huge bureau in the corner, and said: "It was a monster he made out of this. It destroyed him because he learned somehow to fear

it, and, fearing it, he willed it to do what it did."

"Huh?" mumbled one policeman. "Feared it? Why?"

"That I do not know."

"Well, we'll damned soon find out," the policeman snapped. "Give me a hand here, Jenkins."

Beginning with the top drawer, the two policemen removed the bureau's contents. They did so carefully, inspecting each item before dropping it to the floor. In the third drawer from the bottom they found, wedged far back and buried beneath heavy articles of wearing-apparel, a woman's arm, wrapped in an oblong of torn sheeting which was caked with congealed blood.

In the next drawer they found four more blood-caked packages, which they unwrapped with increasing horror. In the last drawer of all they found a single large bundle which contained a woman's head.

Mr. Bellini, standing as near them as they would permit, gazed calmly into the woman's rigid features and said without emotion:

"It is his wife."

