

# Weird Tales



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Cover by Margaret Brundage

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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.*

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.



"She'll be like me — and she'll stay here forever!"

# Unhallowed Holiday

By O. M. CABRAL

*Unhallowed, earthbound, he sought another who might be his playmate for Eternity; sought—and found. . . .*

THE front door slammed with a gusty bang, and Julia Lathrop jumped nervously, dropping the book she had been reading. From the hallway came the sound of a child's clear treble, then light, running feet.

"Virginia!" Julia called, trying to suppress the strange quaver in her voice, the sudden hard beating of her heart. "That you—Gin?"

"'Course it's me, mother!" And Gin came into the room.

The child was thin like a growing reed, awkwardly graceful and tall for her nine years. She was proud of her missing front tooth and her two taffy-colored braids which were still too short, really, to ever stay braided. Julia noted the look of luminous happiness on the child's delicate face, the wind-ruffled hair like a fine, spun web, the too-bright eyes that had of late become a little secret and remote.

"*Must* you, darling, slam the door when you come in?"

"It wasn't me," Gin protested, a trifle sulkily.

"Virginia!"

"Well, but it *wasn't*. It was Tommy, really. He came in when I did, but he ran right out again—"

Julia's lips tightened a little as she studied the child's face. She could discern nothing but candor there. Virginia's hurt air of being misunderstood seemed real enough.

"Virginia—you're not to tell that story again, do you hear? It's silly—just something you made up. There isn't any such person, and you know it! I know it's just a game, but it's a wicked one, and—"

Virginia stamped her foot. Her childish face contorted with grief and anger. Two huge tears squeezed out of her stricken eyes and worked their way down her smooth apple cheeks.

"It isn't!" she sobbed. "It isn't just a story! It's true—every bit! Tommy's real! We—we played tag in the orchard before we came in! He isn't a fib, I didn't make anything up, I *didn't*!"

Frightened, Julia jumped up and crossed the room in quick strides. She grasped the thin, heaving shoulders and looked down into Gin's tearful, accusing face. Trying to mask the unsteadiness in her voice, she spoke casually:

"Don't do that, Ginny—don't cry. Mother didn't mean anything bad. Here's a hankie—that's better, isn't it?" Her fin-

gers flew, smoothing the fine, taffy-colored hair. "You must have been playing tag with the wind! Look—you've lost a ribbon and torn your skirt."

"Tommy runs faster than me," said the child, more calmly. "I chased him but he got away in the briar patch. I guess that's how I tore my new dress."

Suddenly Julia swept the taffy-colored head close. She didn't want Gin to see her face just then.

"Seems to me," Julia said gaily, "this Tommy of yours is *always* running away. He must be quicker than a rabbit. Is that why I've never seen him?"

"Oh, Mother! He's *scared* of people!"

"Yes? And why?"

"Because—well, because."

The childish voice trailed off. The room was very quiet. Julia stiffened, staring fixedly over Gin's bowed head—staring through the wide-open casement windows, at the clean, warm, yellow afternoon sunlight.

Beyond the white sashes were the massed blooms of the hollyhocks, trim, precise and sane. Beyond the flower-bed she could see a shaven slope of lawn, and still further away the ripe grass uncut at the foot of the old orchard.

The orchard, she thought frantically—forcing herself to think—was frightfully run-down. The twisted, wind-tortured trees assumed such grotesque shapes at night. Those dead husks should have been cut down long ago—they were unsightly, and spoiled the place. The orchard field itself was grown over with lank weeds and sparse wild hay that had seeded itself on the wind. She watched how the wind wove a patch through the tall grass of the orchard field—invisible feet retreating from the edge of the lawn back toward the shadows of the twisted apple-trees.

She watched intently how the yellow grass rippled at the base of a gnarled trunk,

and a big, sooty crow suddenly flapped from a dead limb, raucously crying.

AT FIRST, Julia had been crazy about the place. The sprawling white house on a hilltop had seemed exactly what they were looking for. The land itself was considerably run-down, but for that reason rather wild, very charmingly diversified, and not really like a farm at all.

Cliff Lathrop had joked to their friends about their recently-acquired thirty-acre "estate." It had, he proudly boasted, a hill, a gully, a house, a red barn, a private road, an orchard (no good), a strip of woods (second growth), and a private, spring-fed lake.

Yes, the pond (really a lake to their city-bred eyes) had just about clinched the sale. It lay in a hollow behind the house and at the base of the hill—far enough away so that they were not really troubled with mosquitoes that must have bred in the strip of swamp that surrounded the pond.

The swamp didn't matter, for it was not unsightly. Thick rhododendron grew there, a mass of pink bloom in the late spring. And there were trees and ferns and purple iris. In the muddy shallows of the water grew thin, tall sedge-grass, water-lilies and graceful cat-tails. A shallow ridge of cleared, dry ground—maybe once an old wagon-road—led from the house itself down through the woods to a small floating dock built by some previous owner.

They had planned such a grand summer, but Julia was beginning, now, to hate the place. Even in the bright sunlight she would remember suddenly, and shiver—wondering if, after all, the place were really some sort of trap in which, slowly, sanity slipped away until at last you came to accept as a matter of course that which was beyond reason or credibility.

Virginia . . .

What was happening—what in heaven's name was wrong with the child? From the

first, just as they had hoped, she had blossomed happily in the clean country air—frolicked and played from dawn to dusk. But Julia, watchful and puzzled, alert to every nuance of strangeness in Gin's behavior, could no longer deny to herself that there was something weirdly wrong with the child. For either Gin had become obsessed with some vast, elaborate and very complicated kind of lying, or else—

But the alternative she refused, steadfastly, to permit herself to believe, even yet.

"But why be upset?" Cliff asked innocently when, at last, Julia brought herself to speak to him about Gin's lying. "Kid's are always making up things—it's only harmless imagination working overtime."

"It isn't—exactly," Julia said slowly, choosing her words with a certain amount of care. "And you musn't scold her about it—it has the strangest effect. She gets upset, terribly unnerved. And it frightens me because—well, because I can see that she really *believes* in this imaginary playmate. Oh, you don't know what it's been like! It frightens me—but I didn't want to say anything to you until I was really *sure!*"

Cliff's mouth opened. He looked at his wife curiously.

"Sure of what? Of her belief, you mean? Well, suppose she *does* believe, sort of, in this fictitious Tommy? Maybe she's lonely—maybe he's real, in a sort of way, to her childish imagination—you know, the way people in fairy-tales were real to her, when she was younger? It's just a fad, and she'll outgrow it—maybe get tired of the game when she sees we don't take it very seriously. Seems to me that's the thing to do—tease her out of it, not pull a long face and get all wrought up about something that doesn't even exist—"

But at dinner Cliff's teasing brought unexpected results.

"Well, I hear Virginia's got a beau, eh,

Julia?" Cliff winked at his wife, ladling out a liberal helping of cold chicken for the child. "Young man name of Tommy—or so I've been told."

"Who told you?" Virginia's clear eyes clouded with suspicion. The bantering tone was evidently not to her liking.

"Who told me?" Cliff mocked his small daughter. "Well, now—is it a secret?"

"Yes," the child answered, with a scowling glance at her mother. "Sort of."

"Oh! Well, since the secret's out now, might we be told where the young gentleman lives? Seems to me he must do quite a cross-country hike to get out here from—well, wherever he's from."

"Oh, no!" The child's eyes, round and serious, were vaguely troubled. She hesitated, then as though under some dim necessity to make herself somehow understood, added quietly: "You wouldn't understand. He lives right nearby, you see—"

"Oh—some little boy staying at the Jackson farm?"

"Daddy, don't be silly! He lives right here on our place—in the pond. That's where he goes when he goes back *in* again—and I know 'cause I've seen him."

NOT again that evening did they make any reference to Gin's queer obsession—for otherwise the child behaved normally enough. Cliff played checkers with his small daughter and allowed her to beat him twice. After that, she went happily and triumphantly to bed.

Afterward, with the child asleep upstairs and the eerie moonlight glistening like frost on the clipped lawn, Julia abruptly drew the curtains over black panes.

"Heaven knows," said Cliff, amused, "we've no lack of privacy out here!"

"I—was just jittering," Julia confessed, unable to tell him just then how she had felt—that overpowering warning instinct of being watched, of *not* being alone. That the moonlit lawn had been bare, without

blur or shadow, had only made the feeling somehow more terrible. "Cliff—what are we going to *do*?"

"About Gin? Well—I think she's lonely. You ought to send for one of her friends. Having some other kid around will chase this funny idea out of her head quick enough—what say?"

"I've thought of that," Julia told him. "I've already sent for Elsie. She's at the seashore now, but her mother wrote that she can come out and stay with Gin for a week or two. Oh, Cliff—you don't think there's something wrong? I mean, that she really sees things and—"

"Sick, you mean? Naw! She's healthy as a chipmunk, eats like a little pig and sleeps like a log. Say, old girl—did it ever occur to you the little tyke might, after all, be real? Up the road apiece, past Jackson's, there's a Lithuanian family—plenty of kids, all assorted ages. See, it must be one of them—"

"But, Cliff—three miles away? And besides—"

"What's three miles to a country kid? And you've never seen him because he's shy, see? But you act as if everything's natural and maybe he'll show up one morning with his paw out for a cookie!"

"Oh, Cliff! You think so?"

"Well, it *might* be so! Personally, I think we've been letting Gin's well-developed imagination run away with us—scaring ourselves, and without any reason. Now, look—there's only one sensible view to take: either he's a myth—and she'll outgrow it—or else there really is such a kid, but he's scared and over-shy. In either case, what's terrible about it?"

Cliff's reasoning steadied her, but only for a moment. For it was not only that Julia had watched the child racing across the lawn, followed apparently by none but the wind—gleefully shouting and calling to someone who never answered. It was not only that, for countless days now, Gin

had stubbornly persisted in her pretence that she was never really alone any more, that always an invisible child was at her side sharing in her childish games. There was more to it—an indefinite, but horrifying more—the one bit that Julia had held back from Cliff.

The day before she had seen the invisible playmate!

In bright sunlight, grass rippling gently as though some small animal stirred at its roots; a small, furtive sound, like the passage of a snake . . .

She, Julia, had crossed the lawn to call Gin for lunch. The child was sitting quietly under a big beach umbrella, making a crude, crayon sketch. Julia, smiling and looking down over Gin's shoulder, saw the scrawled likeness of a little boy in blue overalls. Gin had made a round, jack-o'-lantern face wreathed in an exaggerated grin. She had drawn in thick, stubby hair of a bright reddish-orange, and made the feet bare.

All at once Julia had been breathlessly conscious that there was someone *else*—someone standing in the orchard field just behind her—someone so dim and indistinct that when she turned her head it was as though colors flickered in the bright sunlight—wavered and vanished, like an abruptly dissolving mirage.

But for one breathless instant, for one heartbeat, she had seen something—*something*, surely! A wavering image, like the warping of air in heat-haze; the shadowy simulacrum of a small figure, standing in the ripe grass of the field.

It had seemed to Julia that the dissolving vision held color—blue tint, like faded overalls; a white shirt; a face unseen because it was surmounted by a big hat of yellow straw.

But afterward when, fingers pressed to her eyes, she tried to recall details that had been blurred—only shadowy suggestion—Julia wondered whether she had not merely imagined it. Heat and glaring sunlight

distort vision. Perhaps she had simply projected, in vision, the blue-overalled boy of Gin's childish sketch—the drawing she had carefully labelled, in angular block letters: "TOMMY."

IT WAS with unutterable joy that Julia welcomed Elsie. The two children were of the same age, had been neighbors in the city. But curiously, Virginia exhibited no great enthusiasm at seeing her old playmate again. She was indifferent and ignored the other child.

"I won't stay here any more!" Elsie cried one morning, storming into the kitchen in tears. "I hate it here! I want to go home, please!"

"Oh, Elsie! What's the trouble? Did you and Gin quarrel again?"

"No, it's that ugly, horrible boy! He spoils everything! He—"

"Elsie!" Julia snatched the child's arm and swung her sharply toward her. "You saw him?"

"'Course I saw him!" Elsie looked annoyed. "What do you mean? He comes every day but he won't come near us. He just stands there, watching, or follows us around—and it's scary! I threw stones at him but they didn't hurt him. He just laughed and wouldn't go home. And Gin said she hates me. She said I scared him and now he won't come and play until I go back home!"

With Elsie's abrupt leaving the household became, to all appearances, normal again. Gin's impatience to be rid of the encumbering Elsie had been only too evident. Now the invisible other returned, to remain at her side throughout all of the long summer day. Gin laughed and prattled and was happy—and under the apparent light-hearted gaiety Julia was aware that horror hid and slowly uncoiled as day slid into day.

Even Cliff, now, began looking strangely at his small daughter. Once or twice Julia

found him staring intently through the window—saw him start nervously as she entered the room, grin sheepishly and turn away in an embarrassed fashion. It was he who urged that she take Gin to a specialist—and Julia acquiesced because she thought that a trip to the city might be good for the child.

The outcome was only what she might have expected. Gin's fantasies, said the doctor, did appear to be of a somewhat hallucinatory nature. But she, Julia, must not become alarmed. The child was in good health and should remain at home. She should not be punished, or forced in any way to relinquish her queer obsession. That might have harmful consequences. She, Julia, must be patient and endeavor to lead her back to reality by pretending, for the moment, to fall in with her make-believe. If Gin persisted in her obsession or if the hallucinations became more alarming they would probably have to resort to other measures.

Driving back, Julia reflected that doctors were all very well—but after all, she knew best. She had not told him one rather important thing—that Gin's fantasies had had reality—of a sort—for at least two other people. The one useful bit of advice that the doctor had given her only represented a decision that she had already made: that if she were to save her little girl from madness—or something even worse—she must do it, from now on, through love and guile. Gently and with patience, she must win the child away from—that hated other!

"I've seen the little devil," Cliff told her that evening, when they were alone again. Julia looked blank. "That kid!" he went on. "Gin's friend."

"Oh—he was here!"

"I'll say he was here! Last evening after you left, I caught the little tyke standing on the lawn, staring up at the windows. It wasn't sundown yet. There was plenty of light—I—he looked—"

"Quick—how did he look?"

Cliff frowned, swallowing a little. His eyes betrayed vague puzzlement. When he spoke again, he seemed to be choosing his words very carefully.

"Why, um—about like any little country boy. Blue patched overalls, bare feet, carried a frayed straw hat in his hands. Had a mop of red hair that seemed to need cutting. Maybe he had freckles, too. He'd come for Gin."

Julia laughed shakily.

"And that's all that happened?"

"Well—no. I went to the door and told him Gin had gone to the city. I'll be darned if his face didn't screw up with the most horrible look of hate. He shook his small fist at me and began crying."

"Oh, Cliff—did he threaten anything?"

"Him? Cliff scratched his head. Again, he seemed hesitant and a little sheepish—as though he were withholding something of which he felt uncertain, or a little ashamed. "Hell, he was only a little shaver, 'bout an inch taller than Gin I'd say. But there was something downright—well, pitiful about him some way. I got the idea then he thought Virginia'd gone away for good. So I went out on the porch and told him to quit sniveling—Gin would be back next day. And then—and then I took a few steps toward him. He turned around and ran out on the road. I followed, but when I got out to the road there wasn't a thing in sight. Still, when I went back to the house, I had the feeling that he hadn't ever left, at all.

"I think, somehow, he was hanging around all night—but that's nuts, isn't it? If I'd caught him, though, I'd have twisted his blamed ear off! And you know what? For the first time since we came out here I was sorry we didn't have a dog—a big, savage one!"

She could not foresee, now, a fierce tug-of-war for the possession of Gin. And as the struggle became more intensified,

that other became less cautious. As Julia had hoped, he emerged into the open at last. By great patience, she had managed to meet her antagonist face to face. It happened in this way:

Determined to be with Gin as much as possible from now on, she had suggested to the child that they pack a picnic basket, don bathing suits and spend the day at the pond. The suggestion seemed to startle Gin, yet please her.

"I dunno," she had objected uncertainly. "Tommy lives there. He—"

"He needn't be afraid of me, dear. Let him join us there. We can all spend the day together, then. Wouldn't that be nice? And if you'll just tell him he has nothing to fear from me, ever, and that I want to be friends—"

"I *would* love a swim," Gin had interrupted. "Down at the pond."

So presently they were sitting on the edge of the water-soaked float, dabbling bare feet in the bright water. It was a perfect summer day—hot and breathlessly still.

The water, blue in the pond's deep center, was brown in the shallows, dappled green with thick lily-pads. Virginia squealed happily as she lowered herself into the cold water, paddling at the edge of the float and showing off the new stroke her father had taught her.

All at once Julia was aware of someone standing in the muddy shallows just behind—someone stealthily watching, half-hidden by the thin, tall reeds. Very matter-of-factly, Julia turned her head, forcing herself to smile at the vision.

"Hello," she said calmly. "I'm glad you came at last. We've been waiting for you, Gin and I—and won't you come sit with us, out here?"

"Tommy!" Virginia crowed, holding to the edge of the float with one hand and waving frantically at the small, furtive figure in the reeds. "Tommy—c'm on!

Look—I can swim a little on my back! Tommy—look!"

Like some small, cautious animal, the child very slowly left the reedy shallows where he was crouching and clambered up onto the bank. He shuffled across the bare strip of ground behind the float and stood there, to all appearances bashfully hesitant, grinning and squirming his bare toes in the dry earth.

There seemed nothing malevolent or remarkable about him now. He was small, Julia saw—indeed scarcely bigger than Gin herself. He seemed a bit thin or "spindling"—or else his faded, patched overalls and quaintly cut shirt were a little too big for him. This time, he carried his big straw hat, and she could see his face quite plainly—a grinning, engaging, freckled face surmounted by an unruly mop of red hair worn longish in the style of another time.

"Won't—won't you come near us?" Julia repeated her invitation a little faintly.

"No, ma'am," she heard the boy distinctly say—still grinning, eyes lowered as though in shy embarrassment, bare toes wriggling a pattern in the dry dust.

**S**UDDENLY Julia stood up. As though in pleading, she stretched out her hand—took three quick steps across the bobbing float toward the small, smiling child on the bank. He looked up, then—and the hatred in the blue eyes leaped out at her, stabbing.

"Child, why do you hate me? I wouldn't harm you—don't you know that? I only want to know—the truth. Why you are this way, and what I can do to help you be at peace—"

He was gone. Quite simply, he turned his back, stepped toward the reeds and melted into their midst—disappeared. The float rocked as Gin, dripping and clumsy, heaved herself out of the water.

"Why, he's gone!" Gin said reproach-



fully. "Oh, Mother—you drove him away again!"

It was hot—there was such a dazzle on the water. The sky was a tight, lacquered bowl. Everything was too still, too close, too bright. Julia clutched despairingly at Gin's small, dripping figure.

"What's the matter, Mommy?" The childish voice, full of puzzled concern, made Julia break into uncontrollable weeping. "Do you feel awful bad?"

"Bad," Julia sobbed, clutching Gin the harder. "Awfully bad! My poor little girl! Don't leave me, ever? You'll promise—stay close beside me?"

"'Course I'm right here, Mommy," Gin replied with childish dignity. "I'm sorry you hurt. Shall I dip some water out of the pond and put it on your head?"

"The pond—no! Let's go back—and don't ever go near it again! Keep away from it—you hear? It's—it's cursed!"

THE time had come, Julia felt, when she could no longer continue the unequal struggle. For now, with every passing hour, she was losing—Gin was slowly, but surely, slipping away from her. Only one alternative remained—to go away. And now she was forced to tell Cliff the truth.

"I been thinking about telling you for two days," Cliff unexpectedly informed her. "I know all about it. I've been inquiring around, ever since that afternoon when I—saw the kid." He looked at Julia bleakly. "Yeah—I really knew, then, something was wrong. It's the pond. Kid name of Tom Beaufield drowned there. Nine years old, he was—and that was seventy years ago."

"Seventy years," Julia repeated with dry lips. "Yes, I saw how it must have been—the old-fashioned haircut, the quaint shirt he wore."

"They never found him," Cliff went on. "The family moved away. Then a childless couple had the place—never noticed

anything wrong. Then the old bachelor coot we bought the place from. It's my fault—I should have sent you and Gin away before. But now this clinches it. Start packing tomorrow."

"No—I won't even pack—at least, nothing but a small suitcase. We won't let Gin know until the last minute. Even then, maybe, we'd better pretend we're just going for the day. After we've gone you can board up the windows, see that our things get moved—"

Julia clapped her hand over her mouth, suppressing a scream.

"He was there!" she cried frantically, pointing to the wide-open window. "He heard us—every word!"

Cliff swore savagely. He leaped to the door and flung it wide open to the night. Across the lawn trotted a small shape, indistinctly seen by the light of a gibbous moon: a small lad in overalls who turned his head once, looking back, as if in derision. The instant Cliff stepped outside the door, he had vanished.

"Tomorrow!" Julia choked. "Tomorrow—if it isn't too late!"

They didn't leave because during the night Virginia complained of a burning in her throat. By morning she was running a high temperature and babbled deliriously. Alarmed, Julia had sent for a physician. But the man, a local practitioner, advised against moving the child until the fever died down.

"He's won, again!" Julia thought frantically. "He doesn't want her to go away!"

But if Gin had to remain, confined, in that hateful house, she could still watch over her. Never would that hated other get near the child again. Already she had lost too much to him: Gin's sanity, and perhaps her life itself. That sinister, malignant child of the pond would never dare set foot over the threshold of the house so long as she, Julia, remained on guard—alert and vigilant to the shadowy enemy.

He came in the early afternoon. Quite simply, she knew that he was there, outside—and sure enough, when she went to the door, there stood the little overalled lad, straw hat set askew on his head, face up-tilted to the windows—Gin's window.

Julia walked out on the porch and, slowly, he lowered his head, staring full at her with bright blue eyes. He let her get within eight feet of him, then turned and walked away.

"Wait!" Julia cried sternly. "Stand where you are!"

He looked back over one shoulder. Under the shadow of the wide-brimmed hat she could see his eyes—sly, taunting. She could see the wide, mocking grin. It seemed to her that she had never known anything more malevolent, more horrifying than that child's face—thin, freckled and full of an unchildish wisdom, a knowledge of something beyond her, a power she was utterly unable to cope with.

"Stop!" she sobbed. "Please! Let me speak—just once?"

The other stopped. Julia considered flinging herself at him, but before she could move the lad solemnly raised his hand and beckoned to her. Then, looking back and again beckoning, he led her deliberately across the field and down the hillside toward the orchard.

"Why," cried Julia breathlessly when at last he permitted her to overtake him—"why are you doing this? What do you want?"

The lad lowered his eyes.

"I ain't a-gonta be alone," he muttered. "Not no more!" He looked up, and again she felt the stab of those blue, child's eyes. "You—you want to take her away, but she ain't a-goin'! She'll be like me—and she'll stay here forever!"

"You want her to be dead!" Julia screamed.

"She *is* dead," the lad answered. "Now, already. Go see."

THE house was empty. Gin, in her feverish delirium, must have left while the other lured Julia away. Distraught, weeping, she ran from room to room—mocked everywhere by the ringing echoes of her own voice.

The pond—was that what he had meant? Julia ran, stumbling down the rough trail swamped out through the patch of woods. She found Gin's two small shoes set side by side on the edge of the pond.

In response to her hysterical telephone call Cliff came home. Others, too, came to console her or join in the search. Close-mouthed men—strangers—tramped over the fields. The woods were combed. At night, as the search spread to the surrounding hills, there was the mournful baying of hounds.

"Get some sleep!" Cliff begged. "Maybe—there's still a chance—"

"No!" she sobbed. "Tell them not to look any more! She's in the pond—I know it!"

"They'll drag tomorrow," Cliff whispered haggardly. "We'll see."

Sometime in the night it began raining. Julia slept—but sleep was more terrible than waking reality. She plunged awake out of choking nightmare, to the drab grayness of earliest morning, and the sound of rain in the eaves gutters.

Downstairs Cliff slept huddled in a chair. He had not even taken off his shoes. The telephone had remained mute throughout the night. Julia tiptoed past him, down the hall and out the door.

It had rained heavily. A chill light glistened on every leaf and blade. Julia raised her face to the cold drops, feeling them soothe the terrible throb in her head, the ache in her eyes. She shut her eyes and walked blindly, feeling she could never get enough of the cold, pelting rain.

"Mommy!"

Her eyes flew open. Then she cried out and ran, sobbing brokenly, toward the

small figure standing uncertainly in the rain and the gray mist.

"Gin! I knew you'd come back! Oh, I knew you wouldn't leave me forever!"

"Don't come any closer, mommy!" Gin said. "Please!"

"Oh, Gin—let me hold you, just once!"

Gin shook her head.

"You can't, mommy. But I've got to go now. Tommy's waiting."

The child turned, and with elfin grace glided off into the rain. Julia ran—stumbling often as the wet grass tangled about her feet.

Gin ran too, fled barefooted, with the speed of the wind. In the eerie grayness she seemed part of the silver rain, part of the mist flowing along the tops of the wet grass. Her two short braids, drenched and dark, swung out behind her as she ran. In the milky opacity, another child, barefoot and overalled, raced to her side and joined hands with her.

"Children—wait! Please!" Julia shrieked.

She ran stumbling through the rain—and always the children, hands clasped,

were just a little ahead. She lost them presently—and found, bewildered, that once again she had ventured down the trail to the edge of the pond.

She turned away from the loathsome sight of the water, gray and pelted with raindrops. Weeping, blinded, she stumbled against a solid body—a pair of arms encircled her.

"Good God, Julia!" Cliff said hoarsely. "What are you trying to do? Come on back—quick now!"

"Virginia," Julia wept. "Earthbound. Unhallowed, for ever and ever."

"I heard you scream," said Cliff. "Saw you running across the field in the rain. I yelled and yelled, but you didn't stop."

Faintly and very far away, a dog began to bark. Julia twisted loose from Cliff's embrace—pointed to the wet earth. Cliff stiffened, his face slowly whitening.

Two sets of tracks—the fresh prints of small, bare feet, led into the pond. Even as they looked, they were already beginning to fade under the pelting drops of the cold, heavy rain.

