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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Diana and the Golden Ring."



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DETOUR

FROM

By
Rog Phillips

When Freddy stepped across the edge of the mysterious area he seemed to shrink in size suddenly, and behind him Lester moved backward in shocked amazement..



TOMORROW

Was it possible that the small alfalfa field was actually a crossroad in time? And if so, what sort of law governed its travel?

LESTER BARCLAY didn't connect the circle of yellow, dying alfalfa in the hog pasture, with the excitement over the radio about the mysterious radar asteroid. Even if he had thought of it, which would have been quite remarkable in a fourteen year old farm boy, he would have seen no possible connection.

He did pause to wonder and to notice the almost sharp line of delineation between the healthy, dark

green alfalfa and the withered plants. His sharp eyes found the three dead field mice in the withered area, too. He almost stepped over the border to get a closer look at them, then with a fear born of superstitious dread he ran across the field.

On the country road he soon met up with other young people on their way to school. He might have mentioned what he had seen to his friends, but he was already settling



into the pattern of silent reticence of his father and decided against mentioning it to anyone.

It was nearly a week before he worked up courage to cross the hog pasture again. This time, without telling him anything, he took Freddy Bartholemue along. Freddy was his best friend and also handier with his fists than anyone else.

The sickly color of the alfalfa had changed again to a healthy deep green. Whatever had caused it had set the plants back, and the circular area was very easy to find because the alfalfa in it was shorter.

Lester led Freddy directly toward the area with deliberate innocence, pausing to let Freddy step over the line first. There was nothing cowardly in that. Merely caution. If anything serious had happened to Freddy he would have risked his life to go in after him.

What did happen was quite unexpected and unbelievable. Les kept his eyes on Freddy's back every instant. When Freddy stepped across the edge of the mysterious area Les' eyes seemed to get a slight cramp in their focus—and Freddy was several inches shorter than he had been before.

Freddy heard Lester's gasp of surprise. He turned his head to look back.

"Gosh, Les," he exclaimed. "What's happened to you? You look bigger than you did a minute ago!"

"You look smaller'n a peanut!" Les countered with a nervous laugh.

A look of belligerency appeared on Freddy's face. He doubled up his fists and stepped out of the circle.

"Don't go callin' me no peanut," he said. "I'm as big as you are."

As he stepped past the mysterious edge he suddenly became normal size again to Lester's eyes.

"Gee whiz no," Les said placating-

ly. "I didn't call you no peanut. I just said in there you look like you're shorter. Look,—I'll step over where you were and you can see for yourself."

Suiting his actions to his words he stepped over into the mysterious area. Freddy watched him and experienced the same queer feeling of eye cramp.

"Sure enough," he whispered in hoarse amazement. "Hey! You're little enough now so I can lick you easy."

HE DASHED across the invisible line. His eyes saw Lester grow suddenly larger. Lester's eyes saw Freddy grow suddenly smaller. They were once again equal in size, but with the curious impression remaining that they were both somehow smaller than they had been.

Now Lester noticed something new.

"Freddy!" he said excitedly. "The alfalfa comes half way up to my knees. That's all the higher it comes out there, and it's shorter in here. It still looks shorter in here just like it did when we looked at it from out there."

"Yeah," Freddy said. "And look at the middle of the short stuff. It looks uphill!"

The two boys, half frightened now, took each other's hand for mutual security, starting toward the center of the area by common impulse. Their footsteps became slow and sluggish. Their bodies leaned forward more and more.

As they neared the center of the area they could feel some invisible force *pulling* them back. They reached the center of the hundred foot circle panting and exhausted, and sank down in the alfalfa to rest. The moment they had reached that

center the hindering force had vanished.

"Gosh all fish hooks!" Les swore manfully. "The ground's perfectly level, but I'm almost afraid to take a step for fear I'll tumble downhill!"

"Me too," Freddy admitted. "What do you suppose is the matter with this place?"

"I don't know," Les said guiltily. Then he told Freddy how it had looked before. "It wasn't that way the day before that," he concluded. "I crossed right through this place and it wasn't that way any other time before that I can remember."

Freddy looked across the field with a little smile on his tanned face, sensing the subtle compliment of Les wanting him along when he ventured out to explore this mystery.

"Well," he said matter-of-factly. "We can't stay here. I gotta get home or dad'll tan me good."

He stood up determinedly and took a bold step. Immediately his sense of balance caused him to lean backward. He took a few more steps and stopped to look around when he heard Lester laughing.

"You look funny," Lester said. "Why don't you fall? You're tipped over far enough!"

"I don't feel tipped over," Freddy said nervously. "Come on! It doesn't feel half as bad as it looks."

He started on. Les, afraid to be left to brave the trip alone, jumped to his feet and ran the fifty feet to the edge, his feet seeming to be ahead of his body and his body seeming to be racing to catch up.

Catching the contagion of panic, Freddy ran also. They didn't pause until they reached the fence that surrounded the alfalfa field. There they turned and looked back. The hundred foot circle of stunted looking alfalfa seemed quite innocent and ordinary in appearance from the

fence—except that the few pigs grazing in the field stayed studiously far away from it.

"I WANNA go too!" Five year old Jimmy Barclay stuck his chin out and doubled his pudgy fists.

"Oh go on and play with your dolls," Freddy Bartholemue said belittlingly.

"Pipe down, Freddy," Lester Barclay said softly. "If mom hears us she'll make us let him tag along."

"I wanna go! I wanna go! Ahh hn-hn-hn-hn. Waahhh," Jimmy wailed loudly.

Mrs. Barclay appeared in the open kitchen window.

"Lester," she called. "You take Jimmy with you."

"Oh, all right, mom," Lester said disgustedly.

Freddy glared at little Jimmy who grinned triumphantly, his eyes sparkling at the prospect of adventure.

The two fourteen year old boys skuffed their feet across the yard followed by five year old Jimmy. The two oldsters got a small measure of satisfaction out of ploughing through a small carpet of three week old pigs and making them scamper with grown up, angry grunts.

Circling the barn they took the lane to the alfalfa pasture, their hands dejectedly in their pockets, while Jimmy, his face serene and contented, trudged behind.

When they reached the pasture they lifted Jimmy over the fence, then hopped over. There were secret smiles on Lester's and Freddy's faces as they contemplated how Jimmy would probably react when confronted with the strange behavior of the mystery area.

They reached the edge and by silent agreement came to a casual stop. Jimmy paused beside them.

When they showed no sign of going on, he wandered forward across the "line".

"Jimmy," Freddy said casually in a tone calculated to cause the five year old to merely turn his head.

Instead, Jimmy seemed not to hear. The moment he had stepped into the mystery area he had come to an abrupt pause, his eyes fixed straight ahead.

"Jimmy!" Freddy repeated, making his voice sharply commanding. Still Jimmy seemed not to hear.

Suddenly Jimmy turned and ran toward the fence. He had managed to climb over by the time Les and Freddy caught up with him.

Thinking he was running from fear they tried to stop him and calm him; but he shook them off and continued running along the lane toward the field where his father was working.

"Don't tell pop," Les coaxed, keeping even with his little brother. There was a determined, worried firmness to little Jimmy's lips. He didn't bother to reply.

JUD BARCLAY saw his two sons and the neighbor boy running across the field toward him in a manner that presaged trouble. He shut off the tractor and jumped down with swift ease, made it over the weeder with one light touch of a foot on its frame, and started to meet the boys.

"Daddy!" Jimmy called pantingly. "Come quick. Come quick! There's a lady in the alfalfa and she's hurt awful bad."

"Wny!" Les and Freddy halted with amazed surprise.

"There isn't either!" Les denied in outraged tones. "Jimmy, you're lying."

"I'm NOT lying," Jimmy said desperately, taking his father's rough

hand and trying to get him started. "There is too a lady in the alfalfa field. She's hurt bad and I think she's dying."

"Suppose we go see about this," Jud said tolerantly. He took his small son's hand and started to walk toward the lane.

"Run, daddy," Jimmy said anxiously, trying to pull his father.

Jud picked up his son and lifted him onto his shoulders. Jimmy wrapped his legs and hung on while Jud ran with long smooth strides.

Lester and Freddy, still protesting that Jimmy hadn't told the truth, trailed along behind. At the fence into the alfalfa field Jud stepped over with Jimmy still on his shoulders.

"Down," Jimmy requested when they neared the mystery area. When Jud let him down he took Jud's hand again and led him to the spot where he had stood, just over the line.

"See?" Les said triumphantly. "There isn't anybody there."

"Be quiet," Jud ordered calmly. "Tell me what you see, Jimmy." He took out a corn-cob pipe and filled it while he listened to his small son's voice.

"She's right there," Jimmy said, pointing to a spot in the exact center of the strange circle. "She's in a—a—auto. A funny kind of an auto; and she's hurt."

"Can she see you?" Jud asked. Behind his mask of pretended belief was a feeling of gleeful amusement. He had no doubt but that this was a game of make-believe that Jimmy was playing to mystify his older brother. He was "playing along" with it.

"She's looking right at me," Jimmy said in an awed voice.

Out of the corner of his eye Jud saw that if what he guessed was real-

ly Jimmy's plan, he was succeeding. Both Freddy and Lester were changing from bold disbelief to doubtful uncertainty.

"She's talking," Jimmy whispered dramatically. "She wants to know where she is."

"Tell her she's just three miles due south of Ridley, Indiana," Jud suggested.

"That isn't what she wants to know," Jimmy shook his head swiftly. "She wants to know where she is."

"Tell her she's on the Earth," Jud suggested, his lips twisting in an effort to keep from laughing.

Jimmy looked toward the spot where he claimed the lady was.

"She says she don't think she can find out where she is from that," Jimmy said, looking gravely up at his father. "She says if you can tell her the law of gravitation she may be able to find out where she is."

THE STRUGGLING, suppressed grin on Jud Barclay's lips vanished abruptly. He looked piercingly at his small son.

Tell her it's—," he frowned in an effort to remember. "Tell her it's directly proportional to the mass and inversely proportional to the square of the distance, or fairly close to that."

Jimmy frowned toward the center of the mystery area for a full minute. Abruptly he smiled and looked gratefully up into his father's eyes.

"She told me to thank you, daddy," he said happily. "She says she can find out where she is now and call for help."

Jimmy turned his head and looked at the spot where he claimed to see the "lady". He remained that way with an intent expression on his face for several minutes. Once again he snapped out of his reverie abrupt-

ly.

"The lady says that isn't quite enough, daddy," he said. "She wants to know what things are made of here."

"Why,—why," Jud said. "Atoms, I guess. Yes. That's it. I remember now. There's ninety-two different kinds of atoms and everything's made out of them."

"That isn't what she wants to know either," Jimmy said after only ten seconds of silent frowning.

"I'll bet he's making this up as he goes along," Freddy whispered hoarsely into Lester's ear.

"What does she want to know," Mr. Barclay asked his five year old son coaxingly.

"She wants to know—," Jimmy frowned as if he were having difficulty. "What are the atoms made of?"

"Why, electrons and—and protons, I think," Jud faltered.

Jimmy frowned some more before speaking again.

"The lady says she can see you don't know what she must find out in order to know where she is," he finally said. "She wants us to bring out somebody who will know the answers right away quick or she will die."

"Are you *sure* that is what she said?" Jud asked gravely.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," Jimmy said, returning his father's gaze. Then he started to cry. Jud picked him up and turned toward the lane.

"Please, daddy," Jimmy sobbed against Jud's neck. "Don't let the beautiful lady die. Hurry."

Lester and Freddy were keeping pace with Jud.

"Aww," Freddy said. "If there was any ol' beautiful lady there she would be dead already. That thing's been there over a week now."

"What thing?" Jud asked sharply, stopping.

Faltering, spelling each other off, Freddy Bartholemue and Lester Barclay told Mr. Barclay all about the strange circular area. Lester told how it had looked the first day. Each told his experience of wading to the center of the area and going out.

Jud Barclay's face grew more grim with each word. When the two boys finished talking he set Jimmy back on the ground.

"Run back and tell the lady I'll get help as soon as it can get here, Jimmy," he said. "And you, Lester, you go back with him and stay with him until I come back."

"GLAD YOU could get here right away, Dr. Brown," Jud said gruffly, opening the door for the young man sitting behind the wheel of the blue sedan.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Barclay? Your wife?" Dr. Brown was in his early thirties.

"I—I want to explain why I called you instead of Doc Bradfield," Jud said uncomfortably, ignoring the question. "You see,—come with me and never mind your bag. You can't use it anyway."

"I'll take it just the same," Dr. Brown said, snatching it from the seat and trotting to keep up with Jud. "What's this all about?"

"I don't know," Jud said over his shoulder. "There isn't time to find out. You just come with me and do what you're told and we can ask questions later."

The two men trotted around the barn and down the lane to the alfalfa field. The three boys were huddled together out in the field. The hogs were all in one corner at the far end of the field, their snouts pointed inquiringly at the boys.

Dr. Brown, thinking there must be someone injured and laying concealed in the alfalfa leaped the fence without touching it and ran toward the boys. He was looking around mystified when Jud came up.

"Tell the lady that Dr. Brown can probably answer what she wants to know," Jud said to Jimmy.

"What can he do?" Freddy jeered. "She ain't there. You can walk right through her."

"You be quiet or I'll send you home," Jud ordered. "Now, Jimmy."

Jimmy looked toward the spot where he claimed to see the lady. A moment later he turned. His grave eyes looked pleadingly at Dr. Brown.

"She wants you to tell me what atoms are made of," he said.

Dr. Brown glanced suspiciously at Jud Barclay, saw the serious expression on his face, and decided to humor the five year old boy and ask questions himself later.

"Tell her atoms are made of electrons, protons and neutrons, Jimmy," he said. "Tell her the electrons are about eighteen hundred times lighter in mass than the protons and neutrons."

Jimmy concentrated once more. Suddenly his face lighted up with a smile.

"She says you are telling her what she wants to know," he said happily. "Now she wants to know if there are any other things on that order." He stumbled over the last three words.

"Tell her there are also things called mesons or mesotrons, that are of varying masses between that of the electron and that of the proton, with some of them almost three hundred times the mass of the proton."

In a brief moment Jimmy said, "She says that's all she needs to know to give her location so she can be rescued!"

"Tell her I'd like to ask a question or two myself," Dr. Brown said, smiling mischievously.

Jimmy frowned a moment.

"She's busy calling for help right now," he said gravely. He turned his eyes back to the center of the mystery area again and seemed to be watching something invisible. Nearly five minutes later he turned and spoke.

"She says it is only fair for her to answer your questions," he said. "Your information saved her life and she says she thanks you."

"Ask her how knowing the building blocks of matter can tell her where she is, since the laws of nature are the same everywhere," Dr. Brown asked.

JIMMY turned his face to the center spot. When he answered he kept his face there rather than turning and looking at the doctor.

"The lady says that is wrong," he said slowly as if repeating something someone was telling him. "The laws of nature are like the key and the padlock. She is like a key in the wrong lock here. The energy of our nature won't fit in her substance, and the energy in her substance won't fit in our things, so we can't see or feel her."

"Then how can you—." Dr. Brown stopped, feeling foolish at having fallen in his own trap. He glanced wryly at Jud Barclay and continued. "Ask her how YOU can see her."

Jimmy frowned. Suddenly he began to cry.

"What did you say?" Dr. Brown asked anxiously.

"She said I can't see her," Jimmy wailed. "She said I—only—see—her—like you'd see—a finger—through a piece of oiled paper."

"But why should that make you cry, Jimmy?" Dr. Brown said soothingly.

ingly.

"Because I love her and she's a beautiful lady," Jimmy cried, rubbing his eyes with his fists.

For no apparent reason he stopped crying and smiled happily through his tears.

"She said I mustn't cry," he said. "She said she is the beautiful lady but I can't see all of her."

"Fine," Dr. Brown said with a grateful glance toward the empty air over the spot where Jimmy kept concentrating his eyes.

"Ask her what the trouble is," he asked after a moment's thought.

"She says her—*auto* got out of order and she hurt herself and got badly burnt," Jimmy answered.

"How long ago was this?" Dr. Brown asked quickly, a strange eagerness in his voice.

"She says she don't know what our time is," Jimmy replied.

"The boys say this strange thing began to happen a little over a week ago," Jud said quietly. "They didn't tell me about it or I would have come out and looked for myself."

THE WIND came with sudden violence. Freddy had been standing on one foot. The wind toppled him over. It also picked Dr. Brown's grey felt hat off his head and lifted it about twenty feet into the air. It fell strangely.

The wind had carried it up and about ten feet into the strange area. When it fell it fell back the way it had gone up, landing at the doctor's feet.

The wind lasted less than ten seconds. It was replaced by a remarkable set of sensations and sights.

To each of the two men and three boys the alfalfa field seemed to tip up at a different angle and become the side of a fairly steep hill. Every one of the five seemed to be leaning

completely off balance in a different direction.

It was Jimmy who took their minds off their changed surroundings and back to the things they had been dealing with before.

"It's another auto!" he exclaimed. "There's another lady and she's helping the beautiful lady out of her auto!"

"Tell her not to go yet," Dr. Brown said desperately. In his mind he was saying, "I don't believe this. Can't. But I can't let it get away from me yet."

"She's sleeping," Jimmy said. "The other lady said she will die if they don't go right away."

"Tell her please," Dr. Brown said desperately. "Ask her what they are."

Jimmy concentrated.

"She says they are just as real as we are," he said. "She says the basic laws of her universe are in-com-patible with the basics of our universe, and so they are separate, or almost so."

There was suddenly a strange vibrational sensation. A weak but determined breeze started up and was still almost before it began. The field tilted down level for everyone. The last strange feeling was that the surface of the immediate surrounding alfalfa seemed to rise up two or three inches.

Things became normal with such abruptness that they seemed unreal. Jimmy began to cry again. His older brother, Lester, went to him and put a consoling arm around his small shoulders.

"Don't cry, Jimmy," he said awkwardly. "WE love you."

"Sure we do," Jud said, picking little Jimmy up and tossing him in the air and catching him, with an effort at gayness.

"Don't, daddy," Jimmy sniffled.

"O. K., son," Jud said gruffly. He cradled Jimmy in one arm and held him tightly against his chest with the other and let him cry quietly.

"Gee! It's all gone!" Freddy said, awed. "Look, Les. It don't work no more." He hopped over into what had been the mystery area where he would seem to become smaller. Nothing happened.

"Heck!" Lester exclaimed, disappointed.

Dr. Brown and Jud Barclay walked slowly, side by side toward the fence.

"I wonder if whatever that was could have anything to do with that mystery thing that flashed all over the sky a little over a week ago," Dr. Brown said quietly. "It didn't burn up like an ordinary meteor would do, but just left a trail of slightly glowing fire behind it. You remember the scientists were in quite a furor about it. A reward was offered to anyone who discovered where it landed."

"Probably the thing that caused all that fuss all right," Jud said. He smiled wryly and added, "But try to prove it now!"

THE TWO men stepped over the hog fence surrounding the alfalfa field and went down the lane toward the barn.

"What I can't figure," Jud said as they left the lane and went into the barnyard. "Is how the law of gravitation and the things you told her about neutrons and such could tell her where she was, while telling her she was on the Earth didn't make sense to her."

"Oh, she asked what the law of gravitation was?" Dr. Brown asked interestedly.

"Yes," Jud said. "And when I told her she said it wasn't enough. Just like there were some places where

there was a different law of gravitation and other places where the law of gravitation was the same, and she had to know more. Like maybe someone would ask which way the Smiths live and I would answer down the north fork of the road, and then they would ask how far down."

"Yes, I can see that," Dr. Brown replied. "And what she said about her reality and ours being incompatible,—that violates the very foundation of science which says that the laws of science are universal. It's called the postulate of uniformity, I believe. I'm no scientist, but I think I can vaguely see what she was trying to say. Why even with our own stuff glass will pass only visible light, and is opaque to ultraviolet. Porcelain will pass ultraviolet and not visible light. And a glass tube will convey liquids, while a copper wire will conduct electricity..."

He stopped talking with a dazed look in his eyes.

"Ha!" he snorted. "Here I go talking like the visions of a five year old were reality!"

"What WE experienced wasn't the imaginings of a five year old," Jud said dryly.

"No," Dr. Brown said doubtfully. "I guess not. But WE didn't see any beautiful lady. I wonder where he picked up that expression, anyway."

"I call my wife that sometimes," Jud said, turning red under his tan.

"See?" Dr. Brown said, putting a wealth of meaning into the word. He looked down at Jimmy, who was sound asleep with his head on his father's chest and a smile on his lips.

"Just the same—" Jud began stubbornly.

"Yes, I know," Dr. Brown interrupted. "You don't see how it all could have come out of your son's

imagination, arising from the simple fact of something mysterious being there for a week and then going away. Maybe it couldn't. It doesn't make any difference, now that it's not there to back us up if we tried to tell what we think happened.

"But childish imagination or not," he went on thoughtfully. "It opens up something interesting. Suppose instead of one set of natural laws and one type of universe of matter, we have two—or maybe more; and the matter and energies in any one of them sort of go together in lumps, so that here you have one law of gravitation and one set of chemical elements, and so on, and somewhere else you have another and different setup. Then light from one would have to maybe change its wavelengths and even maybe its entire form in order to affect matter in the other in any way, and matter in one might be so different that it wouldn't even be considered real in the other, and vice versa. That makes me wonder if we were any more solid to Jimmy's lady than she was to us!"

They had reached the doctor's car. As Dr. Brown opened the door and dropped his black case on the seat, Jud began to chuckle throatily.

"What's so funny?" Dr. Brown asked, smiling.

"One thing Jimmy's beautiful lady had in common with us, anyway," Jud replied.

"What's that?" the doctor asked, pausing with his foot on the running board.

"She was out driving and smashed up her car," Jud replied. "About now I'll bet her husband is grinding his teeth over the repair bill, not to mention the hospital bill if she was banged up as much as she claimed."

Dr. Brown climbed behind the wheel and started the motor, a wide

grin on his face.

"Maybe her husband carried insurance on it," he suggested. His eyes dropped to Jimmy's sleeping face with its serene smile. His professional eye told him the five-year-old boy was in perfect health. As he slipped

the gear shift into low he smiled at Jud Barclay.

"About five, isn't he?" he asked.

"Don't worry then. He'll get over this before he grows up. It's just puppy love."

THE END