



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

CHARLES BEAUMONT

*Perchance to Dream*  
*Selected Stories*

Foreword by RAY BRADBURY  
Afterword by WILLIAM SHATNER

## PERCHANCE TO DREAM

CHARLES BEAUMONT (b. Charles Nutt) was born in Chicago on January 2, 1929. At eleven years old he contracted spinal meningitis and his mother moved them to Everett, Washington, to get away from the brutal Chicago winters. There, he lived in a boardinghouse run by his grandmother and his aunts. Confined to bed because of his illness, Beaumont discovered reading and the joys of storytelling. It was during this time that he made his decision to become an artist of one kind or another. After trying his hand as an illustrator, actor, musician, and writer, Beaumont settled on writing and began to produce one short story after another. Desperate for money, he took a summer job at a railroad office in Mobile, Alabama, where he met his future wife, Helen. Together, they moved to Los Angeles in 1949, where Beaumont continued his arduous road to a professional career. Along the way, he became friends with Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Jerry Sohl, William F. Nolan, and several other aspiring science fiction and fantasy writers. They became known as “The Southern California Group” and worked together to improve one another’s writing as well as promote the genre of fantasy and science fiction. In 1954 Beaumont’s “Black Country” became the first short story featured in *Playboy* magazine. Over the course of the next ten years, he published two novels, three collections of short stories, and penned an estimated twenty-two episodes for *The Twilight Zone*. The episodes he wrote, often based on his own short stories, are considered some of the show’s finest. He also wrote numerous screenplays, several of which were filmed and directed by Roger Corman. Tragically, his health began to fail in his early thirties due to an illness virtually unknown at the time, but later thought to be a form of early onset Alzheimer’s. He died at the age of thirty-eight, leaving no shortage of questions about what he might have produced with the many years of life denied to him.

RAY BRADBURY (1920–2012) had a career spanning more than seventy years and inspired generations of readers to dream, think, and create. A prolific author of hundreds of short stories and close to fifty books, as well as numerous poems, essays, plays, teleplays, and screenplays, Bradbury was one of the most celebrated writers of our time. His groundbreaking works include *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He wrote the screenplay for John Huston’s classic film adaptation of *Moby-Dick* and won an Emmy Award for his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree*. He was the recipient of the 2000 National Book Foundation’s Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters and the 2007 Pulitzer Prize Special Citation, among many other honors.

WILLIAM SHATNER (b. 1931) has cultivated a career spanning more than fifty years as an award-winning actor, director, producer, writer, recording artist, and horseman. He is one of Hollywood’s most recognizable figures and a major philanthropist. In 1962, he earned his first starring role in Roger Corman’s *The Intruder*, written by Charles Beaumont. Since then, his career highlights include the iconic role of Captain James T. Kirk in the *Star Trek* television series and movies, Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning roles in *The Practice* and *Boston Legal*, a successful one-man show, and nearly thirty bestselling books.

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## Foreword

### *Beaumont Remembered*

The facts have been written before. In the summer of 1946, when I was 26, a sixteen-year-old boy bumped into me in Fowler Brothers Book Store in downtown Los Angeles, and began babbling about his *Terry and the Pirates* comic collection, plus *Tarzan*, plus *Prince Valiant*, plus who-can-remember-now how many other truly amazing and life-enhancing subjects.

It could only follow, out of such a passionate encounter, that a friendship developed like those stop-motion films of flowers speeded up from seed to stem to full blossom in ten seconds flat. I invited Charles Beaumont, for that was the young man's name, over to gaze at my *Buck Rogers* Sunday color panels. He trotted along his somewhat dog-eared copies of *Terry* and his irresistible *Pirates*. We made some trades, and moved on into a friendship that would last until his untimely death twenty years later.

What followed over the years was joy in the sandbox, or, if you prefer, tomorrow is New Year's so what does that make *today*?—a celebration! For Chuck there were no cries of “*Thank God, It's Friday.*” It was always the long weekend, as it was with me, when some new love occupied, hell, preoccupied the senses and delivered us forth to worlds where nothing else existed except our creatures and our architectures. Our friendship leaned half in and half out of cinema long shots, comic-strip surrealistic closeups, carnival magicians, old radio shows, and longlegging it to ancient bookstores for a hyperventilating snuff of book dust. If I had allowed them, dogs might have followed me down the street. I didn't know where I was going, but it was sure great going there. Which is what dogs and budding writers are all about. Chuck was the same, save the dogs *did* dance about him, and friends . . . too many, perhaps. They used up his air. In the end, it might be true, he dispensed so much creative and conversational energy that there was none left over to fight any disease that chanced to dart in. But, all that comes later.

First, after a series of jobs, working for United Parcel delivery services, and finally in the music-copying department at Universal Studios, Chuck showed up at my house one night in the early fifties with his first short story. He handed it over, his face flushed with excitement, and cried, “It's good! C—*I think it is!*”

I read the story, cried:

“Good, hell; it's fine!”

I sent the story out to an editor. It sold.

Bombed into super-activity by the sale, Chuck wrote dozens more, hundreds more, over the years. I often use him as an example to other young writers. It *does* work. Writing, that is, a story a week for a year, three years, ten years! You can't help but get better every single week of every single year. Chuck got better.

Better at what?

He was, and remains in his work today, a writer of ideas, notions, fancies. You can tell his ideas to your friends in a few crisp lines. ~~He is a story-teller who weaves his stories out of those ideas, some large, or, you may claim, predominantly small.~~

No matter. At least the seeds are there, as they have rarely been since Poe got lost in the snow, Melville sank from view, shipwrecked on land, or Nathaniel Hawthorne invented a mechanical butterfly to be promptly destroyed. For, remember, those American writers of the 19th century were, one and all, idea folks. Slap their backs and they spat cosmic seeds.

The years between 1830 and 1900 were brimful of metaphor, chock full of nuts, fruits, and, if not sublime Holy Ghosts, at least headless horsemen ruining your midnight sleep, but delighting your tranquil noons.

Charles Beaumont, if not equal, is at least heir to these, even as most of us in the science fantasy field have felt ourselves to be their lost sons.

You can, in sum, remember Beaumont's ideas long after the stories slide away into yesterday. Compare this with trying to *tell* the ideas of Hemingway, Faulkner, or Steinbeck. In Faulkner's case, the metaphor, while present, is lost in place, time, and character, if not completely sunk in an endless timbercut of words.

You cannot remember or describe Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* or his *The Long Valley* in terms of metaphor. What you warmly recall is well-rendered scene, blooded people. The Joads may well be, and are indeed, symbols for us on our way somewhere, towards a future, every dawn, settling at dusk to dream it better than it happened three hours ago. But we rarely deep-think Steinbeck. We deep-fee him, and arrive at our thoughts later.

So it is with Hemingway, and the mob of imitators who have flooded his wake since 1929. His metaphors are obvious, but the bullfight is too easily symbolic, as is the running of the Pamplona bulls, or the shooting of the white hunter in lost Africa. Again, we remember places, people, but none of Hemingway's characters go anywhere, even though they move. They do little to change time, or the architecture of anyone's future, even their own. They stand still while traveling, and die dumb, not knowing where they've been or how it all happened. Paco, who gets a kitchen knife in his belly, in Hemingway's masterful "The Capital of the World," represents them all. He sees his blood on the floor and wonders how it got there. Why *him*?

Jules Verne's characters, more primitive, of course, nevertheless deliver idea-talk. They live metaphor more grandly and uniquely. It is boy-chat yes, but Verne's metaphors span the globe and land us on the Moon. Listen to Verne; he really moves your mind, heart, soul, body, and blood. Listen to Papa and you fire your gun at a sky where you think there are birds, but none exist.

Verne's characters *make* things happen. If their blood falls on the ship's planking or the rocket's hull, they know the reason why, and are not afraid to say it. Nemo is out to sink the world's armadas, and thus sink War. He is the metaphor of Peace, dreadfully personified.

Beaumont, it follows, is closer kin to Verne and Hawthorne than he is to Hemingway or most of the writers who have come up through the Forties, Fifties, and Sixties to our time.

Am I claiming that Charles Beaumont is the equal of or superior to those giants? No, I only say that while those large talents strode deeply, Beaumont gives better companionship. He's more fun because he is the neglected thing in our present society: the idea-writer.

Now consider this. America is *the* Idea culture of all time. Our fancies have fulfilled an Industrial Revolution, split the atom, delivered us to the Moon, and promised us incredible futures stored and delivered forth by computers. Yet how ironic it is to prowl your local bookstore only to find the average novel hip-deep in dishwater and dull as soapsuds. Among one hundred best sellers, hardly or

with a ghost of a fancy, or half the spirit of a notion. Ideas, stillborn, everywhere.

Here is where Beaumont, and many another science fiction writer today, takes over, even if at a minor level. Offer his stories to school kids, then watch them toss his notions, at play. His metaphors are fresh, vivid, irresistible.

Hand Hemingway's Spanish toreros or African cowards to most students, and they will be hard put to do their own variations. Same with the Joads in their rickety Ford, heading out of the dust into the sunset. Same with Faulkner's Hound. Their stuff, great and beautiful as it is, cannot be hurled at students, hot after literature, seeking the right corn to drop in their heads to make the Ideas pop.

Idea is everything. So say most modern science-fiction and fantasy writers, who stand as true avant-garde forces at the center of writing today. So says Beaumont. Ricochet one of his ideas around a classroom, and crack a dozen variations within minutes. If you want children to read, Beaumont cries for God's sake bomb them with Revelations! Give them a chance to join the author's game, feel smart, guess themselves into creation.

The stories gathered here prove my point.

Beaumont plays a game for himself, but invites *you* in. His stories are four-man basketball teams; you are the fifth player. Often, you feel that you've won the game yourself, because you write your own version of Beaumont's metaphor. Which is what makes him, finally, such fun.

How can you resist a story like his "The Beautiful People," in which we find a world where everyone has been made over to beauty, where all bodies are perfect, all faces cookie-stamped to handsome-lovely? Then, what happens? One revolutionary girl, one soul, stands up and refuses to be operated on, cookie-stamped, changed!

Okay, class, in the next hour, write your *own* variation on *that*!

Haven't we all, at one time or another, been more in love with a car than any girl who rode in the car with us? Read "The Classic Affair," then remember yourselves. Write your own endings, happy or sad.

Or how about a vampire complaining to his psychiatrist about the high cost of being a night-stalker, financing a coffin, keeping his shirts clean, hating blood, being afraid of bats?

Ready, class? Begin!

Quickly, now, idea after idea, story after story, a summation of metaphors.

Write me a tale about when Mr. Death comes to visit, obviously in the guise of a cemetery-plot salesman.

Write me another about a man who invents a Time Machine so he can shuttle back and shoot his own father, thus causing his own suicide or—what?

Imagine the most unusual and the most frightening baby monster you can possibly imagine, make it grow, call it "Fritzchen," scare the hell out of yourself and thus—scare the hell out of me.

Every single one of these stories is the fox in the hen yard, stirring up a cackle and flurry of ideas among those students fortunate enough to read and react to them.

An aside here. Chuck and I lived in the same Los Angeles territory, where we both passed a cemetery which sported a hand-painted sign: "Free Dirt." This intrigued me so much over the years that I jotted notes in a file folder and commenced a story based on the idea of cemetery earth. What would happen if you bought and *used* it? For *what*?

Then Chuck showed up at the house one night with a story titled—you've guessed it—"Free Dirt."

I read it and threw up my hands. "Okay, it's *yours*! You did it first! Someday I may revise my "Free Dirt" yarn, but, for now—mail this out!"

Chuck laughed, sent out his story, sold it. My story remains in the file. Chuck's earned the right to



no competition in the stretch. Why? Because he was having fun.

~~I realize what a risk I take by daring to use the truly operative word Fun here. It could well label Charles Beaumont and damn him to hell amongst the agonizers and intellectual duck-pressers of the world. For, as you have noticed, you simply *must* agonize for them. If you do not sweat blood by the pint or the jeroboam, if you do not think loud and long or silent and heavy, and show traces of the sunken pit and the glorious masochism of the *litterateur* on your faces, you, sir, you, madam, are *not* writer. Your novel took twenty years of nailing yourself to the cross over your typewriter? Splendid! You say that you revised your short story eighty-nine times, and are *still* not happy with it? Superb! Your three-act drama was in and out of your eyeballs and down on paper through ten thousand revisions! The Croix de Guerre is yours. But don't be surprised if you trip over copies of your boring books as you leave the house. Literature? No. Doorprops is more like it.~~

I don't know when the masochistic, brooding, oh God it's torture, O Jesus will it never end, kind of writing, or interpretation of writing, got its start. It smacks of Byron, but I'm sure he had more schnapps. Joyce's "*Ulysses*" inspired a run on tedium as life-style. Katherine Anne Porter's "Ship of Fools" poured concrete around tens of thousands of hopefuls' novels and sank them without a sound.

So Charles Beaumont is terribly suspect. There he is, out in the middle of the play yard, yelling with delight, chuckling at ideas, building his castle metaphors, and all too obviously enjoying what he does. Unforgivable.

Let's have no laughter here, no smiles. No roars of welcome as an end-of-the-line caboose-idea changes to a locomotive-front-running metaphor and knocks the happy author flying, glad to be hurled, knocked into creativity.

For that's the grandest memory I have of Chuck. He would call to shout over the phone: Listen to *this!* Or he'd sit in our front parlor with mobs of friends, and read a story, or quote the framework, and beam and flash his thick glasses, "Okay, gang?" Then we'd all pitch in.

Sometimes, of an evening, Richard Matheson would toss up the merest dustfleck of notion, which would bounce off William F. Nolan, knock against George Clayton Johnson, glance off me, and land in Chuck's lap. Before anyone could grab or knock it again, Chuck would outline the rest of the tale, sketch in the characters, butter and cut the sandwich, beginning, meat-middle, and end. *Voila!* Applause.

Sometimes we all loved an idea so much we had to assign it to that writer present who showed the widest grin, the brightest cheeks, the most fiery eyes. More often than not, that was Chuck.

What Charles Beaumont would have done with his talent had he lived another ten or twenty years, one can only guess. And that is a cruel and sad business, for I would imagine that, with his sensational curiosity, he would have grown into a half-dozen new fields.

His life revolved around a special desk which he had designed and had built by one of the finest cabinetmakers in the West. His files were beautifully stashed, labeled, and stuffed with a half-million notions, idle fancies, half-grown or full-blown dreams, most of it the result of our first encounters when I had urged, no, goaded him to write one short story a week for the rest of his life. And he had promptly, by God, done so!

We have often wondered, his friends and I, if his very frenzy, his fire, didn't take a final great breath and blow that same fire out. It must remain idle conjecture. I have no easy answers. I admired and envied him while he lived, and suffered his absence when he moved away into illness and death.

Where Charles Beaumont's reputation will be by the end of the century, I cannot say. I am too fiercely involved with his life, too immersed in his travails as a beginner, too proud of his successes in the brief years before he was stopped. I would certainly place many of his stories in the good company

of John Collier and Roald Dahl. Which may or may not be a downer to certain critics who have never been able to enjoy those two authors as I have. No matter. Collier, on at least three occasions, told me of the pleasure he took in reading much of Beaumont. That's good enough for me.

Now, on to the end.

Funerals are always ironic, no matter what the weather.

If it's raining, that's too much: the sky weeps. If the sun is bright, that's worse. It kills the heart when you stand there in the blaze. Whoever is in the grave, you imagine, hates your living soul for being up and about. Or so you imagine, anyway. The friends of Charles Beaumont, at graveside, felt all the above, and more. We felt, above all, that a time was over, and things would never be the same. Our old group would meet less often, and then fall away. What was central to it, the binding force, the conversational fire, the great runner, jumper, and yeller, was gone. None of us felt up to taking his place. We wouldn't have dared. And, trying, we would have failed.

It was, indeed, never the same after that.

We all went our separate ways from the burial ground, stayed in touch, made new liaisons, occasionally dined together, and watched as Charles Beaumont's books and stories began to move toward the edge of that damned pit and fall in. It wasn't right.

Now all that has stopped. No more vanishing books, no more burials. Here are his stories, back in the light on, I hope, some permanent basis.

Here's Charles Beaumont. *My* cup of tea. Is he *yours*?

RAY BRADBURY

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## PERCHANCE TO DREAM

“Please sit down,” the psychiatrist said, indicating a somewhat worn leather couch.

Automatically, Hall sat down. Instinctively, he leaned back. Dizziness flooded through him, his eyelids fell like sashweights, the blackness came. He jumped up quickly and slapped his right cheek, then he slapped his left cheek, hard.

“I’m sorry, Doctor,” he said.

The psychiatrist, who was tall and young and not in the least Viennese, nodded. “You prefer to stand?” he asked, gently.

“Prefer?” Hall threw his head back and laughed. “That’s good,” he said. “*Prefer!*”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand.”

“Neither do I, Doctor.” He pinched the flesh of his left hand until it hurt. “No, no: that isn’t true. I do understand. That’s the whole trouble. I do.”

“You—want to tell me about it?”

“Yes. No.” It’s silly, he thought. You can’t help me. No one can. I’m alone! “Forget it,” he said and started for the door.

The psychiatrist said, “Wait a minute.” His voice was friendly, concerned; but not patronizing.

“Running away won’t do you much good, will it?”

Hall hesitated.

“Forgive the cliché. Actually, running away is often the best answer. But I don’t know yet that you is that sort of problem.”

“Did Dr. Jackson tell you about me?”

“No. Jim said he was sending you over, but he thought you’d do a better job on the details. I only know that your name is Philip Hall, you’re thirty-one, and you haven’t been able to sleep for a long time.”

“Yes. A long time . . .” To be exact, seventy-two hours, Hall thought, glancing at the clock. Seventy-two horrible hours . . .

The psychiatrist tapped out a cigarette. “Aren’t you—” he began.

“Tired? God yes. I’m the tiredest man on Earth! I could sleep forever. But that’s just it, you see: I would. I’d never wake up.”

“Please,” the psychiatrist said.

Hall bit his lip. There wasn’t, he supposed, much point to it. But, after all, what *else* was there for him to do? Where would he go? “You mind if I pace?”

“Stand on your head, if you like.”

“Okay. I’ll take one of your cigarettes.” He drew the smoke into his lungs and walked over to the window. Fourteen floors below, the toy people and the toy cars moved. He watched them and thought this guy’s all right. Sharp. Intelligent. Nothing like what I expected. Who can say—*maybe* it’ll do some good. “I’m not sure where to begin.”

“It doesn’t matter. The beginning might be easier for you.”

Hall shook his head, violently. The beginning, he thought. Was there such a thing?

“Just take it easy.”

After a lengthy pause, Hall said: “I first found out about the power of the human mind when I was ten. Close to that time, anyway. We had a tapestry in the bedroom. It was a great big thing, the size of a rug, with fringe on the edges. It showed a group of soldiers—Napoleonic soldiers—on horses. They were at the brink of some kind of a cliff, and the first horse was reared up. My mother told me something. She told me that if I stared at the tapestry long enough, the horses would start to move. They’d go right over the cliff, she said. I tried it, but nothing happened. She said, ‘You’ve got to take time. You’ve got to *think* about it.’ So, every night, before I went to bed, I’d sit up and stare at that damn tapestry. And, finally, it happened. Over they went, all the horses, all the men, over the edge of the cliff . . .” Hall stubbed out the cigarette and began to pace. “Scared hell out of me,” he said. “When I looked again, they were all back. It got to be a game with me. Later on, I tried it with pictures in magazines, and pretty soon I was able to move locomotives and send balloons flying and make dogs open their mouths: everything, anything I wanted.”

He paused, ran a hand through his hair. “Not too unusual, you’re thinking,” he said. “Every kid does it. Like standing in a closet and shining a flashlight through your finger, or sewing up the heel of your palm . . . common stuff?”

The psychiatrist shrugged.

“There was a difference,” Hall said. “One day it got out of control. I was looking at a coloring book. One of the pictures showed a knight and a dragon fighting. For fun I decided to make the knight drop his lance. He did. The dragon started after him, breathing fire. In another second the dragon’s mouth was open and he was getting ready to eat the knight. I blinked and shook my head, like always, only—nothing happened. I mean, the picture didn’t ‘go back.’ Not even when I closed the book and opened it again. But I didn’t think too much about it, even then.”

He walked to the desk and took another cigarette. It slipped from his hands.

“You’ve been on Dexadrine,” the psychiatrist said, watching as Hall tried to pick up the cigarette.

“Yes.”

“How many grains a day?”

“Thirty, thirty-five, I don’t know.”

“Potent. Knocks out your co-ordination. I suppose Jim warned you?”

“Yes, he warned me.”

“Well, let’s get along. What happened then?”

“Nothing,” Hall allowed the psychiatrist to light his cigarette. “For a while, I forgot about the ‘game’ almost completely. Then, when I turned thirteen, I got sick. Rheumatic heart—”

The psychiatrist leaned forward and frowned. “And Jim let you have thirty-five—”

“Don’t interrupt!” He decided not to mention that he had gotten the drug from his aunt, that Dr. Jackson knew nothing about it. “I had to stay in bed a lot. No activity; might kill me. So I read books and listened to the radio. One night I heard a ghost story. ‘Hermit’s Cave’ it was called. All about a man who gets drowned and comes back to haunt his wife. My parents were gone, at a movie. I was alone. And I kept thinking about that story, imagining the ghost. Maybe, I thought to myself, he’s in that closet. I knew he wasn’t; I knew there wasn’t any such thing as a ghost, really. But there was a little part of my mind that kept saying, ‘Look at the closet. Watch the door. He’s in there, Philip, and he’s going to come out.’ I picked up a book and tried to read, but I couldn’t help glancing at the closet door. It was open a crack. Everything dark behind it. Everything dark and quiet.”

“And the door moved.”

“That’s right.”

“You understand that there’s nothing terribly unusual in anything you’ve said so far?”

“I know,” Hall said. “It was my imagination. It *was*, and I realized it even then. But—I got just as scared. Just as scared as if a ghost actually *had* opened that door! And that’s the whole point. The mind, Doctor. It’s everything. If you *think* you have a pain in your arm and there’s no physical reason for it, you don’t hurt any less . . . My mother died because she thought she had a fatal disease. The autopsy showed malnutrition, nothing else. But she died just the same!”

“I won’t dispute the point.”

“All right. I just don’t want you to tell me it’s all in my mind. I *know* it is.”

“Go on.”

“They told me I’d never really get well, I’d have to take it easy the rest of my life. Because of the heart. No strenuous exercise, no stairs, no long walks. No shocks. Shock produces excessive adrenalin, they said. Bad. So that’s the way it was. When I got out of school, I grabbed a soft desk job. Unexciting: numbers, adding numbers, that’s all. Things went okay for a few years. Then it started again. I read about where some woman got into her car at night and happened to check for something in the back seat and found a man hidden there. Waiting. It stuck with me; I started dreaming about it. So every night, when I got into my car, I automatically patted the rear seat and floorboards. It satisfied me for a while, until I started thinking, ‘What if I forget to check?’ Or, ‘What if there’s something back there that isn’t human?’ I had to drive across Laurel Canyon to get home, and you know how twisty that stretch is. Thirty-fifty-foot drops, straight down. I’d get this feeling halfway across. ‘There’s someone . . . something . . . in the back of the car!’ Hidden, in darkness. Fat and shiny. I’ll look in the rear-view mirror and I’ll see his hands ready to circle my throat . . . Again, Doctor: understand me. *I knew it was my imagination.* I had no doubt at all that the back seat was empty—hell, I kept the car locked and I double-checked! But, I told myself, you keep thinking this way, Hall, and you’ll see those hands. It’ll be a reflection, or somebody’s headlights, or nothing at all—but you’ll see them! Finally, one night, I did see them! The car lurched a couple of times and went down the embankment.”

The psychiatrist said, “Wait a minute,” rose, and switched the tape on a small machine.

“I knew how powerful the mind was, then,” Hall continued. “I know that ghosts and demons did exist, they did, if you only thought about them long enough and hard enough. After all, one of them almost killed me!” He pressed the lighted end of the cigarette against his flesh; the fog lifted instantly. “Dr. Jackson told me afterwards that one more serious shock like that would finish me. And that’s when I started having the dream.”

There was a silence in the room, compounded of distant automobile horns, the ticking of the ship’s wheel clock, the insectival tapping of the receptionist’s typewriter. Hall’s own tortured breathing.

“They say dreams last only a couple of seconds,” he said. “I don’t know whether that’s true or not. It doesn’t matter. They *seem* to last longer. Sometimes I’ve dreamed a whole lifetime; sometimes generations have passed. Once in a while, time stops completely; it’s a frozen moment, lasting forever. When I was a kid I saw the Flash Gordon serials; you remember? I loved them, and when the last episode was over, I went home and started dreaming more. Each night, another episode. They were vivid, too, and I remembered them when I woke up. I even wrote them down, to make sure I wouldn’t forget. Crazy?”

“No,” said the psychiatrist.

“I did, anyway. The same thing happened with the Oz books and the Burroughs books. I’d keep them going. But after the age of fifteen, or so, I didn’t dream much. Only once in a while. Then, a

week ago—” Hall stopped talking. He asked the location of the bathroom and went there and splashed cold water on his face. Then he returned and stood by the window.

“A week ago?” the psychiatrist said, flipping the tape machine back on.

“I went to bed around eleven thirty. I wasn’t too tired, but I needed the rest, on account of my heart. Right away the dream started. I was walking along Venice Pier. It was close to midnight. The place was crowded, people everywhere; you know the kind they used to get there. Sailors, dumpy looking dames, kids in leather jackets. The pitchmen were going through their routines. You could hear the roller coasters thundering along the tracks, the people inside the roller coasters, screaming; you could hear the bells and the guns cracking and the crazy songs they play on calliopes. And, far away, the ocean, moving. Everything was bright and gaudy and cheap. I walked for a while, stepping on gum and candy apples, wondering why I was there.” Hall’s eyes closed. He opened them quickly and rubbed them. “Halfway to the end, passing the penny arcade, I saw a girl. She was about twenty-two or -three. White dress, very thin and tight, and a funny white hat. Her legs were bare, nicely muscled and tan. She was alone. I stopped and watched her, and I remember thinking, ‘She *must* have a boy friend. He *must* be here somewhere.’ But she didn’t seem to be waiting for anyone, or looking. Unconsciously, I began to follow her. At a distance.

“She walked past a couple of concessions, then she stopped at one called ‘The Whip’ and strolled in and went for a ride. The air was hot. It caught her dress as she went around and sent it whirling. It didn’t bother her at all. She just held onto the bar and closed her eyes, and—I don’t know, a kind of ecstasy seemed to come over her. She began to laugh. A high-pitched, musical sound. I stood by the fence and watched her, wondering why such a beautiful girl should be laughing in a cheap carnival ride, in the middle of the night, all by herself. Then my hands froze on the fence, because suddenly I saw that she was looking at me. Every time the car would whip around, she’d be looking. And there was something in her eyes, something that said, Don’t go away, don’t leave, don’t move . . .

“The ride stopped and she got out and walked over to me. As naturally as if we’d known each other for years, she put her arm in mine, and said, ‘We’ve been expecting you, Mr. Hall.’ Her voice was deep and soft, and her face, close up, was even more beautiful than it had seemed. Full, rich lips, a little wet; dark, flashing eyes; a warm gleam to her flesh. I didn’t answer. She laughed again and tugged at my sleeve. ‘Come on, darling,’ she said. ‘We haven’t much time.’ And we walked, almost running, to The Silver Flash—a roller coaster, the highest on the pier. I knew I shouldn’t go on it because of my heart condition, but she wouldn’t listen. She said I had to, for her. So we bought our tickets and got into the first seat of the car . . .”

Hall held his breath for a moment, then let it out, slowly. As he relived the episode, he found that it was easier to stay awake. Much easier.

“That,” he said, “was the end of the first dream. I woke up sweating and trembling, and thought about it most of the day, wondering where it had all come from. I’d only been to Venice Pier once in my life, with my mother. Years ago. But that night, just as it’d happened with the serials, the dream picked up exactly where it had left off. We were settling into the seat. Rough leather, cracked and peeling, I recall. The grab bar iron, painted black, the paint rubbed away in the center.

“I tried to get out, thinking, Now’s the time to do it; do it now or you’ll be too late! But the girl held me, and whispered to me. We’d be together, she said. Close together. If I’d do this one thing for her, she’d belong to me. ‘Please! Please!’ Then the car started. A little jerk; the kids beginning to yell and scream; the *clack-clack* of the chain pulling up; and up, slowly, too late now, too late for anything, up the steep wooden hill . . .

“A third of the way to the top, with her holding me, pressing herself against me, I woke up again.

Next night, we went up a little farther. Next night, a little farther. Foot by foot, slowly, up the hill. At the halfway point, the girl began kissing me. And laughing. ‘Look down!’ she told me. ‘Look down, Philip!’ And I did and saw little people and little cars and everything tiny and unreal.

“Finally we were within a few feet of the crest. The night was black and the wind was fast and cold now, and I was scared, so scared that I couldn’t move. The girl laughed louder than ever, and a strange expression came into her eyes. I remembered then how no one else had noticed her. How the ticket-taker had taken the two stubs and looked around questioningly.

“‘Who are you?’ I screamed. And she said, ‘Don’t you know?’ And she stood up and pulled the grab-bar out of my hands. I leaned forward to get it.

“Then we reached the top. And I saw her face and I knew what she was going to do, instantly: I knew. I tried to get back into the seat, but I felt her hands on me then and I heard her voice, laughing high, laughing and shrieking with delight, and—”

Hall smashed his fist against the wall, stopped and waited for calm to return.

When it did, he said, “That’s the whole thing, Doctor. Now you know why I don’t dare to go to sleep. When I do—and I’ll have to, eventually; I realize that!—the dream will go on. And my heart won’t take it!”

The psychiatrist pressed a button on his desk.

“Whoever she is,” Hall went on, “she’ll push me. And I’ll fall. Hundreds of feet. I’ll see the cement rushing up in a blur to meet me and I’ll feel the first horrible pain of contact—”

There was a click.

The office door opened.

A girl walked in.

“Miss Thomas,” the psychiatrist began, “I’d like you to—”

Philip Hall screamed. He stared at the girl in the white nurse’s uniform and took a step backward. “Oh, Christ! No!”

“Mr. Hall, this is my receptionist, Miss Thomas.”

“No,” Hall cried. “It’s her. It is. And I know who she is now, God save me! I know who she is!”

The girl in the white uniform took a tentative step into the room.

Hall screamed again, threw his hands over his face, turned and tried to run.

A voice called, “Stop him!”

Hall felt the sharp pain of the sill against his knee, realized in one hideous moment what was happening. Blindly he reached out, grasping. But it was too late. As if drawn by a giant force, he tumbled through the open window, out into the cold clear air.

“Hall!”

All the way down, all the long and endless way down past the thirteen floors to the gray, unyielding, hard concrete, his mind worked; and his eyes never closed . . .

• • •

“I’m afraid he’s dead,” the psychiatrist said, removing his fingers from Hall’s wrist.

The girl in the white uniform made a little gasping sound. “But,” she said, “only a minute ago, I saw him and he was—”

“I know. It’s funny; when he came in, I told him to sit down. He did. And in less than two seconds he was asleep. Then he gave that yell you heard and . . .”

“Heart attack?”

“Yes.” The psychiatrist rubbed his cheek thoughtfully. “Well,” he said, “I guess there are worse ways to go. At least he died peacefully.”

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## THE JUNGLE

Suddenly it was there. On foxfeet, invisibly, it had crept, past all the fences and traps he had laid, past all the barriers. And now it sat inside his mind, a part of him, like his pulse, like the steady beat of his heart.

Richard Austin became rigid in the chair. He closed his eyes and strained the muscles in his body until they were silent and unmoving as granite; and he listened to the thing that had come again, taking him by surprise even while he had been waiting. He listened to it grow—it *seemed* to grow; he couldn't be sure: perhaps he was merely bringing it into sharper focus by filtering out the other constant sounds: the winds that whispered through the foliage of balloon-topped trees the murmurous insect-drone of all the machines that produced this wind and pumped blood through the city from the stations far beneath the night-heavy streets. Or, perhaps, it was because he was searching, trying to lay hands on it that the thing seemed to be different tonight, stronger, surer. Or—what did it matter?

He sat in the darkened room and listened to the drums; to the even, steady throb that really neither rose nor diminished, but held to that slow dignified tempo with which he'd become so familiar.

Then quickly he rose from the chair and shook his head. The sounds died and became an indistinguishable part of the silence. It was only concentration, he thought, and the desire to hear the things that gave them life . . .

Richard Austin released a jagged breath from his swollen lungs, painfully. He walked to the bar and poured some whiskey into a glass and drank most of it in a single swallow: it went down his dry throat like knives, forcing the salivary glands back into action.

He shook his head again, turned and walked back across the living room to the far door. It swung out noiselessly as his hand touched the ornamented circle of hammered brass.

The figure of his wife lay perfectly still under the black light, still and pale, as she had lain three hours before. He walked toward her, feeling his nostrils dilate at the acrid medicine smells, harshly bitter and new to his senses. He blinked away the hot tears that had rushed, stinging, to his eyes; and stood for a time, quietly, trying not to think of the drums.

Then he whispered: "Mag . . . Mag, don't die tonight!"

Imbecile words! He clenched his fists and stared down at the face that was so full of pain, so twisted with defeat, that now you could not believe it had once been different, a young face, full of laughter and innocence and courage.

The color had gone completely. From the burning splotchy scarlet of last week to this stiff white mask, lifeless, brittle as drying paste. And covered over with perspiration that glistened above her mouth in cold wet buttons and over her face like oil on white stone. The bedding under and around her was drenched gray.

Austin looked at the bandage that covered his wife's head, and forced away the memory, brutally. The memory of her long silver hair and how it had fallen away in clumps in his hands within a week after she had been stricken . . .

But the thoughts danced out of control, and he found himself remembering all the terrible steps in

this nightmare.

The scientists had thought it malaria, judging from the symptoms, which were identical. But that was difficult to accept, for malaria had been effectively conquered—powerful new discoveries in vaccines having been administered first, and then the primary cause of the disease itself—the *Anopheles* mosquito—destroyed completely. And the liquid alloys which formed the foundations for this new city eliminated all the likely breeding places, the bogs and marshlands and rivers. No instance of re-occurrence of the disease had been reported for half a century. Yet—malarial parasites were discovered in the bloodstreams of those first victims, unmistakable parasites that multiplied at a swift rate and worked their destruction of the red corpuscles. And the chemists immediately had to go about the business of mixing medicines from now ancient prescriptions, frantically working against time. A disquieting, even a frightening thing; but without terror for the builders of the new city; not sufficient to make them abandon their work or to spark mass evacuations. Panic was by now so forgotten by most that it had become a new emotion, to be learned all over again.

It had not taken very long to relearn, Austin recalled. Terror had come soon enough. The stricken—some thirty husky workmen, engineers, planners—had rallied under the drugs and seemed to be out of a critical condition when, one night, they had all suffered relapses, fallen into fevered comas and proceeded to alternate between unconsciousness and delirium. The scientists were baffled. They tried frenziedly to arrest the parasites, but without success. Their medicines were useless, their drugs and radium treatments and inoculations—all, useless. Finally, they could only look on as the disease took new turns, developed strange characteristics, changed altogether from what they had taken to be malaria to something utterly foreign. It began to assume a horrible regular pattern: from prolonged delirium to catatonia, whereby the victim's respiratory system and heartbeat diminished to a condition only barely distinguishable from death. And then, the most hideous part: the swift decomposition of the body cells, the destruction of the tissues . . .

Richard Austin carefully controlled a shudder as he thought of those weeks that had been the beginning. He fingered out a cigarette from his pocket, started to strike it, then broke the cylinder and ground its bright red flakes into his palms.

No other real hint had been given then: only the disease. Someone had nicknamed it "Jungle Rot"—cruel, but apt. The victims *were* rotting alive, the flesh falling from them like rain-soaked rags; and they did not die wholly, ever, until they had been transformed into almost unrecognizable mounds of putrescence . . .

He put out a hand and laid it gently against his wife's cheek. The perspiration was chill and greasy to his touch, like the stagnant water of slow banks. Instinctively his fingers recoiled and balled back into fists. He forced them open again and stared at the tiny dottles of flesh that clung to them.

"Mag!" It had started already! Wildly, he touched her arm, applying very slight pressure. The outer skin crumbled away, leaving a small wet gray patch. Austin's heart raced; an involuntary movement caused his fingers to pinch his own wrists, hard. A wrinkled spot appeared and disappeared, a small, fading red line.

She's dying, he thought. Very surely, very slowly, she's begun to die—Mag. Soon her body will turn gray and then it will come loose; the weight of the sheet will be enough to tear big strips of it away . . . She'll begin to rot, and her brain will know it—they had discovered that much: the victims were never completely comatose, could not be adequately drugged—she will know that she is mouldering even while she lives and thinks . . .

And why? His head ached, throbbed. *Why?*

The years, these past months, the room with its stink of decay—everything rushed up, suddenly,

filling Austin's mind.

If I had agreed to leave with the rest he thought, to run away, then Mag would be well and full of life. But—I didn't agree . . .

He had stayed on to fight. And Mag would not leave without him. Now she was dying and that was the end of it.

Or—he turned slowly—was it? He walked out to the balcony. The forced air was soft and cool; it moved in little patches through the streets of the city. Mbarara, *his* city; the one he'd dreamed about and then planned and designed and pushed into existence; the place built to pamper five hundred thousand people.

Empty, now, and deserted as a gigantic churchyard . . .

Dimly he recognized the sound of the drums, with their slow muffled rhythm, directionless as always, seeming to come from everywhere and from nowhere. Speaking to him. Whispering.

Austin lit a cigarette and sucked the calming smoke into his lungs. He remained motionless until the cigarette was down to the cork.

Then he walked back into the bedroom, opened a cabinet and took a heavy silver pistol.

He loaded it carefully.

Mag lay still; almost, it seemed to Austin, expectant, waiting. So very still and pale.

He pointed the barrel of the pistol at his wife's forehead and curled his finger around the trigger. Another slight pressure and it would be over. Her suffering would be over. Just a slight pressure!

The drums droned louder until they were exploding in the quiet room.

Austin tensed and fought the trembling, gripped the pistol with his other hand to steady it.

But his finger refused to move on the curved trigger.

After a long moment, he lowered his arm and dropped the gun into his pocket.

"No." He said it quietly, undramatically. The word hit a barrier of mucus and came out high-pitched and child-like.

He coughed.

That was what they wanted him to do—he could tell, from the drums. That's what so many of the others had done. Panicked.

"No."

He walked quickly out of the room, through the hall, to the elevator. It lowered instantly but he did not wait for it to reach bottom before he leapt off and ran across the floor to the barricaded front door.

He tore at the locks. Then the door swung open and he was outside; for the first time in three weeks—outside, alone, in the city.

He paused, fascinated by the strangeness of it. Impossible to believe that he was the only white man left in the entire city.

He strode to a high-speed walkway, halted it and stepped on. Setting the power at half with his passkey, he pressed the control button and sagged against the rail as the belt whispered into movement.

He knew where he was going. Perhaps he even knew why. But he didn't think about that; instead, he looked at the buildings that slid by silently, the vast rolling spheres and columns of colored stone, the balanced shapes that existed now and that had once existed only in his mind. And he listened to the drums, wondering why the sound of them seemed natural and his buildings suddenly so unnatural, so strange and disjointed.

Like green balloons on yellow sticks, the cultured Grant Wood trees slipped by, uniform and straight, arranged in aesthetically pleasing designs on the stone islands between belts. Austin smiled.

The touch of nature. Toy trees, ruffling in artificial winds . . . It all looked, now, like the model he had presented to the Senators. About as real and lifelike.

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Austin moved like a carefully carved and painted figurine, incredibly small and lonely-looking on the empty walkway. He thought about the years of preparation; the endless red tape and paper work that had preceded the actual job. Then of the natives, how they had protested and petitioned to influence the Five-Power governments and how that had slowed them down. The problem of money, whipped only by pounding at the point of over-population, again and again, never letting up for a moment. The problems, problems . . .

He could not recall when the work itself had actually begun—it was all so joined. Laying the first railroad could certainly not have been a particle as beset with difficulty. Because the tribes of the Kenya territory numbered into the millions; and they were all filled with hatred and fury, opposing the city at every turn.

No explanation had satisfied them. They saw it as the destruction of their world and so they fought. With guns and spears and arrows and darts, with every resource at their disposal, refusing to capitulate, hunting like an army of mad ants scattered over the land.

And, since they could not be controlled, they had to be destroyed. Like their forests and rivers and mountains, destroyed, to make room for the city.

Though not, Austin remembered grimly, without loss. The white men had fine weapons, but none more fatal than machetes biting deep into neck flesh or sharp wooden shafts coated with strange poisons. And they did not all escape. Some would wander too far, unused to this green world where a man could become hopelessly lost within three minutes. Others would forget their weapons. And a few were too brave.

Austin thought of Joseph Fava, the engineer, who had been reported missing. And of how Fava had come running back to the camp after two days, running and screaming, a bright crimson nearly dead creature out of the worst dreams. He had been cleanly stripped of all his skin, except for the face, hands, and feet. . . .

But, the city had grown, implacably, spreading its concrete and alloy fingers wider every day over the dark and feral country. Nothing could stop it. Mountains were stamped flat. Rivers were dammed off or drained or put elsewhere. The marshes were filled. The animals shot from the trees and then the trees cut down. And the big gray machines moved forward, gobbling up the jungle with their iron teeth, chewing it clean of its life and all its living things.

Until it was no more.

Leveled, smoothed as a highway is smoothed, its centuries choked beneath millions and millions of tons of hardened stone.

The birth of a city . . . It had become the death of a world.

And Richard Austin was its murderer.

. . .

As he traveled, he thought of the shaman, the half-naked, toothless Bantu medicine man who had spoken for most of the tribes. *“You have killed us, and we could not stop you. So now we will wait, until you have made your city and others come to live here. Then YOU will know what it is to die.”* Bokawah, who lived in superstition and fear, whom civilization had passed, along with the rest of his people. Who never spoke again after those words, and allowed himself to be moved to the wide iron plateau that had been built for the surviving natives.

Bokawah, the ignorant shaman, with his eternal smile . . . How distinct that smile was now!

~~The walkway shuddered, suddenly, and jarred to a noisy grinding stop. Austin pitched forward and grasped the railing in order to break his fall.~~

Awareness of the silence came first. The eerie dead silence that hung like a pall. It meant that the central machines had ceased functioning. They had been designed to operate automatically and perpetually; it was unthinkable that these power sources could break down!

As unthinkable as the drums that murmured to life again beyond the stainless towers, so loud now the silence, so real.

Austin gripped his pistol tightly and shook away the panic that had bubbled up like acid in his chest. It was merely that the power had gone off. Strike out impossible, insert improbable. Improbabilities happen. The evil spirits do not summon them, they *happen*. Like strange diseases.

*I am fighting, he thought, a statistical paradox. That's all. A storage pile of coincidences. If I wait—he walked close to the sides of the buildings—and fight, the graph will change. The curve will . . .*

The drums roared out a wave of scattered sound, stopped, began again . . .

He thought a bit further of charts; then the picture of Mag materialized, blocking out the thick ink lines, ascending and descending on their giant graphs.

Thinking wasn't going to help . . .

He walked on.

Presently, at the end of a curve in the city maze, the "village" came into view, suspended overhead like a gigantic jeweled spider. It thrust out cold light. It was silent.

Austin breathed deeply. By belt, his destination was only minutes away. But the minutes grew as he walked through the city, and when he had reached the lift, hot pains wrenched at his muscles. He stood by the crystal platform, working action back into numbed limbs.

Then he remembered the silence, the dead machines. If they were not functioning, then the elevator

—  
His finger touched a button, experimentally.

A glass door slid open with a pneumatic hiss.

He walked inside, and tried not to think as the door closed and the bullet-shaped life began to rise.

Below, Mbarara grew small. The treated metals glowed in a dimming lace of light. And the city looked even more like the little clay model he had built with his hands.

At last movement ceased. Austin waited for the door to slide open again, then he strode out onto the smooth floor.

It was very dark. The artificial torches did not even smolder: their stubs, he noticed, were blackened and cold.

But the gates to the village lay open.

He looked past the entrance into the frozen shadows.

He heard the drums, throbbing from within, loud and distinct. But—ordinary drums, whose sound-waves would dissipate before ever reaching the city below.

He walked into the village.

The huts, like glass blisters on smooth flesh, sat silent. Somehow, they were obscene in the dark, to Austin. Built to incorporate the feel and the atmosphere of their originals and yet to include the civilized conveniences; planned from an artistic as well as a scientific standpoint—they were suddenly obscene.

Perhaps, Austin thought, as he walked, perhaps there was something to what Barney had been

saying . . . No—these people had elected to stay of their own free will. It would have been impossible to duplicate *exactly* the monstrous conditions under which they had lived. If not impossible, certainly wrong.

Let them wallow in their backward filth? In their disease and corruption, let them die—merely because their culture had failed to absorb scientific progress? No. You do not permit a man to leap off the top of a hundred-story building just because he has been trained to believe it is the only way to get to the ground floor—even though you insult him and blaspheme against his gods through your intervention. You restrain him, at any cost. Then, much later, you show him the elevator. And because he is a man, with a brain no smaller than yours, he will understand. He will understand that a crushed superstition is better than a crushed head. And he will thank you, eventually.

That is logic.

Austin walked, letting these thoughts form a thick crust. He felt the slap of the pistol against his thigh and this, also, was comforting.

Where were they now? Inside the huts, asleep? All of them? Or had they, too, contracted the disease and begun to die of it? . . .

Far ahead, at the clearing which represented the tip of the design, a glow of light appeared. As he approached, the drums grew louder, and other sounds—voices. How many voices? The air was at once murmurous and alive.

He stopped before the clearing and leaned on the darkness and watched.

Nearby a young woman was dancing. Her eyes were closed, tightly, and her arms were straight at her sides like black roots. She was in a state of possession, dancing in rhythm to the nearest drum. Her feet moved so fast they had become a blur, and her naked body wore a slick coat of perspiration.

Beyond the dancing woman, Austin could see the crowd, squatted and standing, swaying; over a thousand of them—surely every native in the village!

A clot of brown skin and bright white paint and brilliant feathers, hunched in the firelight.

An inner line of men sat over drums and hollow logs, beating these with their palms and with short sticks of wood. The sounds blended strangely into one—the one Austin had been hearing, it seemed, all his life.

He watched, fascinated, even though he had witnessed Bantu ceremonies countless times in the past even though he was perfectly familiar with the symbols. The little leather bags of hex-magic: nail-filings, photographs, specks of flesh; the rubbing boards stained with fruit-skins; the piles of bones at the feet of the men—old bones, very brittle and dry and old.

Then he looked beyond the natives to the sensible clean crystal walls that rose majestically, cupping the area, giving it form.

It sent a chill over him.

He walked into the open.

. . .

The throng quieted, instantly, like a scream cut off. The dancers caught their balance, blinked, drew in breath. The others lifted their heads, stared.

All were turned to dark unmoving wax.

Austin went past the gauntlet of eyes, to one of the painted men.

“Where is Bokawah?” he said loudly, in precise Swahili. His voice regained its accustomed authority. “Bokawah. Take me to him.”

No one moved. Hands lay on the air inches above drums, petrified.

“I have come to talk!”

From the corner of his eyes, Austin felt the slight disturbance. He waited a moment, then turned.

A figure crouched beside him. A man, unbelievably old and tiny, sharp little bones jutting into loose flesh like pins, skin cross-hatched with a pattern of white paint, chalky as the substance some widows of the tribes wore for a year after the death of their mates. His mouth was pulled into a shape not quite a smile, but resembling a smile. It revealed hardened toothless gums.

The old man laughed, suddenly. The amulet around his chicken-neck bobbed. Then he stopped laughing and stared at Austin.

“We have been waiting,” he said, softly. Austin started at the perfect English. He had not heard English for a long time; and now, coming from this little man . . . Perhaps Bokawah had learned it. Why not? “Walk with me, Mr. Austin.”

He followed the ancient shaman, dumbly, not having the slightest idea why he was doing so, to a square of moist soil. It was surrounded by natives.

Bokawah looked once at Austin, then reached down and dipped his hands into the soil. The horny fingers scratched away the top-dirt, burrowed in like thin, nervous animals, and emerged, finally, holding something.

Austin gasped. It was a doll.

It was Mag.

He wanted to laugh, but it caught in his throat. He knew how the primitives would try to inflict evil upon an enemy by burying his effigy. As the effigy rotted, symbolically, so would . . .

He snatched the doll away from the old man. It crumbled in his hands.

“Mr. Austin,” Bokawah said, “I’m very sorry you did not come for this talk long ago.” The old man’s lips did not move. The voice was his and yet not his.

Austin knew, suddenly, that he had not come to this place of his own accord. He had been summoned.

The old man held a hyena’s tail in his right hand. He waved this and a slight wind seemed to come up, throwing the flames of the fire into a neurotic dance.

“You are not convinced, even now, Mr. Austin. Aiii. You have seen suffering and death, but you are not convinced.” Bokawah sighed. “I will try one last time.” He squatted on the smooth floor. “When you first came to our country, and spoke your plans, I told you—even then—what must happen. I told you that this city must not be. I told you that my people would fight, as *your* people would fight if we were to come to your land and build jungles. But you understood nothing of what I said.” He did not accuse; the voice was expressionless. “Now Mbarara lies silent and dead beneath you and still you do not wish to understand. What must we do, Mr. Austin? How shall we go about proving to you that this Mbarara of yours will *always* be silent and dead, that your people will never walk through it?”

Austin thought of his old college friend Barney—and of what Barney had once told him. Staring at Bokawah, at this scrawny, painted savage, he saw the big Texan clearly, and he remembered his wild undergraduate theories—exhuming the antique view of primitives and their religions, their magics.

“Go on, pal, laugh at their tabus,” Barney, who was an anthropologist, used to be fond of saying, “sneer, while you throw salt over your shoulder. Laugh at their manas, while you blab about our own ‘geniuses’!”

He had even gone beyond the point of believing that magic was important because it held together the fabric of culture among these natives, because it—and their religious superstitions—gave them a rule for behavior, therefore, in most cases, happiness. He had even come to believe that native magic

was just another method of arriving at physical truths.

Of course, it was all semantic nonsense. It suggested that primitive magic could lift a ship into space or destroy disease or . . .

That had been the trouble with Barney. You could never tell when he was serious. Even a social anthropologist wouldn't go so far as to think there was more than one law of gravity.

"Mr. Austin, we have brought you here for a purpose. Do you know what that purpose is?"

"I don't know and I don't—"

"Have you wondered why you, alone, of all your people, have been spared? Then—listen to me, very carefully. Because if you do not, then what has happened in your new city is merely the beginning. The winds of death will blow over Mbarara and it will be far more awful than what has been." The medicine man stared down at the scattered piles of bones. Panther bones, Austin knew—a divination device. Their position on the ground told Bokawah much about the white people.

"Go back to your chiefs. Tell them that they must forget this city. Tell them that death walks here and that it will always walk, and that their magic is powerful but not powerful enough. It cannot stand against the spirits from time who have been summoned to fight. Go and talk to your chiefs and tell them these things. Make them believe you. *Force* them to understand that if they come to Mbarara, they will die, in ways they never dreamed, of sickness, in pain, slowly. Forever."

The old man's eyes were closed. His mouth did not move at all and the voice was mechanical.

"Tell them, Mr. Austin, that at first you thought it was a strange new disease that struck the workers. But then remind them that your greatest doctors were powerless against the contagion, that spread and was not conquered. Say these things. And, perhaps, they will believe you. And be saved."

Bokawah studied the panther bones carefully, tracing their arrangement.

Austin's voice was mechanical, also. "You are forgetting something," he said. He refused to let the thoughts creep in. He refused to wonder about the voice that came through closed lips, about where the natives could have found soil or fresh panther bones or . . . "No one," he said to the old man, "has fought back—yet."

"But why would you do that, Mr. Austin, since you do not believe in the existence of your enemy? Whom shall you fight?" Bokawah smiled.

The crowd of natives remained quiet, unmoving, in the dying firelight.

"The only fear you hold for us," Austin said, "is the fear that you may prove psychologically harmful." He looked at the crushed doll at his feet. The face was whole; otherwise, it lay hideously disfigured.

"Yes?"

"Right now, Bokawah, my government is sending men. They will arrive soon. When they do, they will study what has happened. If it is agreed that your rites—however harmless in themselves—cause currents of fear—are in *any way* responsible for the disease—you will be given the opportunity to go elsewhere or—"

"Or, Mr. Austin?"

"—you will be eliminated."

"Then people will come to Mbarara. Despite the warnings and the death, they will come?"

"Your magic sticks aren't going to scare away five hundred thousand men and women."

"Five hundred thousand . . ." The old man looked at the bones, sighed, nodded his head. "You know your people very well," he murmured.

Austin smiled. "Yes, I do."

"Then I think there is little left for us to talk about."



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