

THE HILL AND THE HOLE

By Fritz Leiber, Jr.

● The surveyor's instruments said it was a hill; the little girl said it was a hole. Checking again, the surveyor found there was a hole—very unpleasant sort of hole—

Illustrated by Orban

Tom Digby swabbed his face against the rolled-up sleeve of his drill shirt, and good-naturedly damned the whole practice of measuring altitudes by barometric instruments. Now that he was back at the bench mark, which was five hundred eleven feet above sea level, he could see that his reading for the height of the hill was ridiculously off. It figured out to about four hundred forty-seven feet, whereas the hill, in plain view hardly a quarter of a mile away, was obviously somewhere around five hundred seventy or even five hundred eighty. The discrepancy made it a pit instead of a hill. Evidently either he or the altimeter had been cock-eyed when he'd taken the reading at the hilltop. And since the altimeter was working well enough now, it looked as if he had been the one.

He would have liked to get away early for lunch with Ben Shelley at Beltonville, but he needed this reading to finish off the State oil survey for this Midwestern region. He hadn't been able to spot the sandstone-limestone contact he was looking for anywhere but near the top of this particular hill. So he picked up the altimeter, stepped out of the cool shadow of the barn behind which the bench mark happened to be located, and trudged off. He figured he would be able to finish this little job properly and still be in time for Ben. A grin came to his big, square, youthful face as he thought of how they would chew the fat and josh each other. Ben, like himself, was on the State Geologic Survey.

Fields of shoulder-high corn, dazzlingly green under the broiling sun, stretched away from the hill to the flat horizon. The noonday hush was beginning. Blue-bottle flies droned momentarily around him as he skirted a manure heap and slid between the weather-gray rails of an old fence. There was no movement, save for a vague breeze rippling the corn a couple of fields away and a farmer's car raising a lazy trail of dust far off in the opposite direction. The chunky competent-looking figure of Tom Digby was the only thing with purpose in the whole landscape.

When he had pushed through the fringe of tall, dry-stalked weeds at the base of the hill, he glanced back at the shabby one-horse farm where the bench mark was located. It looked deserted. Then he made out a little tow-headed girl watching him around the corner of the barn, and he remembered having noticed her earlier. He waved, and chuckled when she dodged back out of sight. Sometimes these farmers' kids were mighty shy. Then he started up the hill at a brisker pace, toward where the bit of strata was so invitingly exposed.

When he reached the top, he didn't get the breeze he expected. It seemed, if anything, more stiflingly hot than it had been down below, and there was a feeling of dustiness. He swabbed at his face again, set down the altimeter on a level spot, carefully twisted the dial until the needle stood directly over the mid line of the scale, and started to take the reading from the pointer below. Then his face clouded. He felt compelled to juggle the instrument, although he knew it was no use. Forcing himself to work very slowly and methodically, he took a second reading. The result was the same as the first. Then he stood up and relieved his feelings with a fancy bit of swearing, more vigorous, but just as good-natured as the blast he had let off at the bench mark.

Allowing for any possible change in barometric pressure during the short period of his walk up from the bench mark, it still gave the height of the hill as under four hundred fifty. Even a tornado of fantastic proportions couldn't account for such a difference in pressure.

It wouldn't have been so bad, he told himself disgustedly, if he'd been using an old-fashioned aneroid. But a five-hundred-dollar altimeter of the latest design isn't supposed to be temperamental. However, there was nothing to do about it now. It had evidently given its last accurate gasp at the bench mark and gone blooey for good. It would have to be shipped back East to be fixed. And he would have to get along without this particular reading.



He flopped down for a breather, before starting back. As he looked out over the checkerboard of fields and the larger checkerboard of dirt roads, it occurred to him how little most people knew about the actual dimensions and boundaries of the world they lived in. They looked at straight lines on a map, and innocently supposed they were straight in reality. They might live all their lives believing their homes were in one county, when accurate surveying would show them to be in another. They were genuinely startled if you explained that the Mason-Dixon line had more jags in it than one of those rail fences down there, or if you told them that it was next to impossible to find an accurate and up-to-date detail map of any given district. They didn't know how rivers jumped back and forth, putting bits of land first in one State and then in another. They went along believing that they lived in a world as neat as a geometry-book diagram, while chaps like himself and Ben went around patching the edges together and seeing to it that one mile plus one mile equaled at least something like two miles. Or proving that hills were really hills and not pits in disguise.

It suddenly seemed devilishly hot and close and the bare ground unpleasantly gritty. He tugged at

his collar, and unbuttoned it further. Time to be getting on to Beltonville. Couple glasses of iced coffee would go very good. He hitched himself up, and noticed that the little girl had come out from behind the barn again. She seemed to be waving at him now, with a queer, jerky, beckoning movement; but that was probably just the effect of the heat-shimmer rising from the fields. He waved, too, and the movement brought on an abrupt spell of dizziness. A shadow seemed to surge menacingly across the landscape, and he had difficulty in breathing. Then he started down the hill, and pretty soon he was feeling all right again.

"I was a fool to come this far without a hat," he told himself. "This sun will get you, even if you're healthy as a horse. Well, I'm through with this job, anyway."

Something was nagging at his mind, however, as he realized when he got down in the corn again. It was that he didn't like the idea of letting the hill lick him. It occurred to him that he might persuade Ben to come over this afternoon, if he hadn't anything else to do, and get a precise measurement, with alidade and plane table.

When he neared the farm, he saw that the little girl had retreated again to the corner of the barn.

He gave her a friendly, "Hello." She didn't answer but she didn't run away, either. He became aware that she was staring at him in an intent, appraising way.

"You live here?" he asked, to start a conversation.

She didn't answer the question. After a while, she said in a strangely hungry voice, "What did you want to go down there for?"

"The State hires me to measure land," he replied. He had reached the bench mark and was automatically starting to take a reading, before he remembered that the altimeter was useless. "This your father's farm?" he asked.

Again she didn't answer. She was barefooted, and wore a cotton dress of washed-out blue. The sun had bleached her hair and eyebrows several degrees lighter than her skin, vaguely giving the effect of a photographic negative. Her mouth hung open. Her whole face had a vacuous, yet not exactly stupid expression.

Finally she shook her head solemnly, and said, "You shouldn't 'a' gone down there. You might not have been able to get out again."

"Say, just what are you talking about?" he inquired, humorously puzzled, but keeping his voice gentle so she wouldn't run away.

"The hole," she answered, almost dreamily. "I mean the hole."

Tom Digby felt a shiver run over him. "Sun must have hit me harder than I thought," he told himself.

"You mean there's some sort of pit down that way?" he asked quickly. "Maybe an old well or cesspool hidden in the weeds? Well, I didn't fall in, anyway. Is it on this side of the hill?" He was still on his knees beside the bench mark.

A look of understanding, mixed with a slight disappointment, came over her face. She nodded wisely, and observed, "You're just like papa. He's always telling me there's a hill there, so I won't be scared of the hole. But he doesn't need to. I know all about it, and I wouldn't go near it again for anything."

"Say, what the dickens are you talking about?" His voice got out of control, and he rather boomed the question at her. But she didn't dart away, only continued to stare at him thoughtfully.

"Maybe I've been wrong," she observed finally, as if talking to herself. "Maybe papa and you and other people really do see a hill there. Maybe *They* make you see a hill there, so you won't know about them being there. *They* don't like to be bothered. I know. There was a man come up here about two years ago, trying to find out about them. He had a kind of spyglass on sticks. *They* made him dead. That was why I didn't want you to go down there. I was afraid *They* would do the same thing to you."

He disregarded the shiver that was creeping persistently along his spine, just as he had disregarded from the very beginning, with automatic scientific distaste for eeriness, the odd coincidence between the girl's fancy and the inaccurate altimeter readings.

He looked at her closely. He had run across mental cases once or twice before in the course of his work, but he also knew that many children like to fabricate nonsense with great seriousness.

"Who are *They*?" he asked cheerfully.

The little girl's blank, watery blue eyes stared past him, as if she were looking at nothing—or everything.

"*They* are dead. Bones. Just Bones. But *They* move around. *They* live at the bottom of the hole, and *They* do things there."

"Yes?" he prompted, feeling a trifle guilty at encouraging her. From the corner of his eye he could see that an old Model-T was chugging up the rutted drive, raising clouds of dust.

"When I was little," she continued in a low trancelike voice, so he had to listen hard to catch the words, "I used to go right up to the edge and look down at them. There's a way to climb down in, but I never did. Then one day *They* looked up and caught me spying. Just white bone faces; everything else black. I knew *They* were thinking of making me dead. So I ran away and never went back."

The Model-T rattled to a stop beside the garage, and a tall hulk of a man in old blue overalls swung out and strode swiftly toward them.

"School Board sent you over?" he shot brusquely at Tom. It was more an accusation than a question. "You from the County Hospital?"

He clamped his big paw around the girl's hand. He had the same bleached hair and eyebrows, but his face was burnt to a brick red. There was a strong facial resemblance.

"I want to tell you something," he immediately went on, his voice heavy with anger but under control. "My little girl's all right in the head. It's up to me to judge, isn't it? What if she don't always give the answers the teachers expect. She's got a mind of her own, hasn't she? And I'm perfectly fit to take care of her. I don't like the idea of your sneaking around to put a lot of questions to her while I'm gone."

Then his eye fell on the altimeter, and he stopped his tirade. He glanced at Tom sharply, especially at the riding breeches and high, laced boots.

"I guess I went and made a damn fool of myself," he said swiftly. "You an oil man?"

Tom got to his feet. "I'm on the State Geologic Survey," he said guardedly.

The farmer's manner changed completely. He stepped forward, his voice was confidential. "But

you saw signs of oil here, didn't you?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders and grinned pleasantly. He had heard a hundred farmers ask that same question in the same way. "I couldn't say anything about that. I'd have to finish my mapping before I could make any guesses."

The farmer smiled back, knowingly but not unfriendly. "I know what you mean," he said. "I know you fellows got orders not to talk. So long, mister."

Tom said, "So long," nodded good-by to the little girl, who was still gazing at him steadily, and walked around the barn to his own car. As he plumped the altimeter down on the front seat beside him, he yielded to the impulse to take another reading. Once more he swore, this time under his breath.

The altimeter seemed to be working properly again.

"Well," he told himself, "that settles it. I'll come back and get a reliable alidade reading, if not with Ben, then with somebody else. I'll nail that hill down before I do anything."

Ben Shelley slumped down the last drops of coffee, pushed back from the table, and thumbed tobacco into his battered brier, as Tom explained his proposition for that afternoon.

A wooden-bladed fan was wheezing ponderously overhead, causing pendant strips of fly paper to sway and tremble.

"Hold on a minute," he interrupted near the end. "That reminds me of something I was bringing over for you. May save the trouble." And he fished in his brief case.

"You don't mean to tell me there's some map for this region I didn't know about?" The tragic disgust in Tom's voice was only half jocular. "They swore up and down to me at the office there wasn't."

"Yeah, I'm afraid I mean just that," Ben confirmed, nodding. "Here she is. A special topographic job. Only issued yesterday."

Tom snatched the folded sheet.

"You're right," he proclaimed, a few moments later. "This might have been of some help to me." His voice became sarcastic. "I wonder what they wanted to keep it a mystery for?"

"Oh, you know how it is," said Ben easily. "They take a long time getting maps out. The work for this was done two years ago, before you were on the Survey. It's rather an unusual map, and the person you talked to at the office probably didn't connect it up with your structural job. And there's a yarn about it, which might explain why there was some confusion."

Tom had pushed the dishes away from in front of him and was studying the map intently. Now he gave a muffled exclamation which made Ben look up. Then he hurriedly reinspected the whole

map and the printed material in the corner, as though he couldn't believe his eyes. Then he stared at one spot for so long that Ben chuckled and said, "What have you found? A gold mine?"

Tom turned a serious face on him. "Look, Ben," he said slowly. "This map is no good. I've found a terrible mistake in it." Then he added, "It looks as if they did some of the readings by sighting through a rolled-up newspaper as a yardstick." It didn't sound funny, because his face was still serious.

"I knew you wouldn't be happy until you found something wrong with it," said Ben, good-naturedly. "Can't say I blame you. What is it?"

Tom slid the map across to him, indicating one spot with his thumbnail. "Just read that off to me," he directed. "What do you see there?"

Ben paused while he lit his pipe, eying the map. Then he answered promptly, "An elevation of four hundred forty-one feet. And it's got a name lettered in—'The Hole.' Poetic, aren't we? Well, what is it? A stone quarry?"

"Ben, I was out at that very spot this morning," said Tom unsmiling, "and there isn't any depression there at all, but a hill! This reading is merely off some trifle of a hundred and forty feet!"

"Go on," countered Ben. "You were somewhere else this morning. Got mixed up. I've done it myself."

"Impossible," Tom shook his head. "There's a five-hundred-eleven-foot bench mark right next door to it."

"Then you got an old bench mark." Ben was still amusedly skeptical. "You know, one of the pre-Columbus ones."

"Oh, rot. Look, Ben, how about coming out with me this afternoon, and we'll shoot it with your alidade? I've got to do it some time or other, anyway, now that my altimeter's out of whack. And I'll prove to you this map is chock-full of errors. How about it?"

Ben applied another match to his pipe. He nodded. "All right, I'm game. But don't be angry when you find you turned in at the wrong farm."

It wasn't until they were rolling along the highway, with Ben's equipment in the back seat, that Tom remembered something. "Say, Ben, didn't you start to tell me about a yarn connected with this map?"

"It doesn't amount to much really. Just that the surveyor—an old chap named Wolcraftson—died of heart failure while he was still in the field. At first they thought someone would have to re-do the job, but then they found that he had practically completed it. Maybe that explains why some of the people at the office were in doubt as to whether there was such a map."

Tom was concentrating on the road ahead. They were getting near the turn-off. "That would have

been about two years ago?" he asked. "I mean, when he died."

"Uh-huh. Or two and a half. It happened somewhere around here. Oh, there was some kind of a mess about it. I seem to remember that some fool country coroner—a local Sherlock Holmes—said there were signs of strangulation, or suffocation, or some other awful nonsense, and wanted to hold Wolcraftson's rodman. Of course, we put a stop to that."

Tom didn't answer. Certain words he had heard a couple of hours earlier were coming back to him, just as if a phonograph had been turned on: "Two years ago there was a man come up here, trying to find out about them. He had a kind of spyglass on sticks. They made him dead. That's why I didn't want you to go down there. I was afraid They would do the same thing to you."

He angrily shut his ears to those words. If there was anything he detested, it was admitting the possibility of supernatural agencies, even in jest. Anyway what difference did her words make? After all, a man had really died, and it was only natural that her defective imagination should cook up some wild fancy.

Of course, as he had to admit, the screwy entry on the map made one more coincidence, counting the girl's story and the cockeyed altimeter readings as the first. But it was so much of a coincidence. Perhaps Wolcraftson had listened to the girl's prattling and noted down "The Hole" and an approximate reading for it as a kind of private joke, intending to erase it later. Besides, what difference did it make if there *had* been two genuine coincidences? The Universe was full of them. Every molecular collision was a coincidence. You could pile a thousand coincidences on top of another, he averred, and not get Tom Digby one step nearer to believing in the supernatural. Oh, he knew intelligent people enough, all right, who coddled such beliefs. Some of his best friends liked to relate "yarns" and toy with eerie possibilities for the sake of a thrill. But the only emotion Tom ever got out of such stuff was a nauseating disgust. It cut too deep for joking. It was a reversion to that primitive, fear-bound ignorance from which science had slowly lifted man, inch by inch, against the most bitter opposition. Take this silly matter about the hill. Once admit that the dimensions of a thing might not be real, down to the last fraction of an inch, and you cut the foundations from under the world.

He'd be damned, he told himself, if he ever told anyone about the altimeter readings. It was just the silly sort of "yarn" that Ben, for instance, would like to play around with. Well, he'd have to do without it.

With a feeling of relief he turned off for the farm. He had worked himself up into quite an angry state of mind, and part of the anger was at

himself, for even bothering to think about such matters. Now they'd finish it off neatly, as scientists should, without leaving any loose ends around for morbid imaginations to knit together.

He led Ben around back of the barn, and indicated the bench mark and the hill. Ben got his bearings, studied the map, inspected the bench mark closely, then studied the map again.

Finally he turned with an apologetic grin. "I've got to admit you're absolutely right. This map is as screwy as a surrealist painting, at least as far as that hill is concerned. I'll go around to the car and get my stuff. We can shoot its altitude from right off the bench mark." He paused, frowning. "Gosh, though, I can't understand how Wolcraftson ever got it so screwed up."

"Probably they misinterpreted something on his original manuscript map."

"I suppose that must have been it."

After they had set up the plane table and telescopic alidade directly over the bench mark, Tom shouldered the rod, with its inset level and conspicuous markings.

"I'll go up there and be rodman for you," he said. "I'd like you to shoot this yourself. Then they won't have any comeback when you walk into the office and blow them up for issuing such a map."

"O. K.," answered Ben, laughing. "I'll look forward to doing that."

This far they had been alone. Now, as Tom started out, he noticed the farmer coming toward them from the field ahead. He was relieved to see that the little girl wasn't with him, although he wouldn't have admitted that even to himself. As they passed one another, the farmer winked triumphantly at him. "Found something worth coming back for, eh?" Tom didn't answer. But the farmer's manner tickled his sense of humor, and he found himself feeling pretty good, all irritation gone, as he stepped along toward the hill.

The farmer introduced himself to Ben by saying, "Found signs of a pretty big gusher, eh?" His pretense at being matter-of-fact wasn't very convincing.

"I don't know anything about it," Ben answered cheerfully. "He just roped me in to help him take a reading."

The farmer cocked his big head and looked sideways at Ben. "My, you State fellows are pretty close-mouthed, aren't you? Well, you needn't worry, because I *know* there's oil under here. Five years ago a fellow took a drilling lease on all my land at a dollar a year. But then he never showed up again. Course, I know what happened. The big companies bought him out. They know there's oil under here, but they won't drill. Want to keep the price of gasoline up?"

Ben made a vaguely affirmative sound, and

busied himself loading his pipe. Then he sighted through the alidade at Tom's back, for no particular reason. The farmer's gaze swung out in the same direction. When he spoke again it was in a different voice, reminiscent, reflective.

"Well, that's a funny thing now, come to think of it. Right out where he's going, is where that other chap keeled over a couple of years ago."

Ben's interest quickened. "A surveyor named Wolcraftson?" he inquired.

"Something like that. It happened right on top of that hill. They'd been fooling around here all day—something gone wrong with the instruments, the other chap said. Course I knew they'd found signs of oil and didn't want to let on. Along toward evening the old chap—Wolcraftson, like you said—took the pole out there himself—the other chap had done it twice before—and stood atop the hill. It was right then he keeled over. We run out there, but it was too late. Heart got him. He must have thrashed around a lot before he died, though, because he was all covered with dust."

Ben grunted appreciatively. "Wasn't there some question about it afterward?"

"Oh, our coroner made a fool of himself, as he generally does. But I stepped in and told exactly what happened, and that settled it. Say, mister, why don't you break down and tell me what you know about the oil under there?"

Ben's protestations of total ignorance on the subject were cut short by the sudden appearance of a little tow-headed girl from the direction of the road. She seemed to be out of breath as if she had been running. She gasped "Papa!" and grabbed the farmer's hand. Ben walked over toward the alidade. He could see the figure of Tom emerging from the tall weeds and starting up the hill. Then his attention was caught by what the girl was saying.

"You've got to stop him, papa!" She was dragging at her father's wrist. "You can't let him go down in the hole. They got it fixed to make him dead, this time."

"Shut your mouth, Sue!" the farmer shouted down at her, but his voice was more anxious than angry. "You'll get me into trouble with the school board, the queer things you say. That man's just going out there to find out how high the hill is."

"But, papa, can't you see?" She twisted away and pointed at Tom's steadily mounting figure. "He's already started down in. They're set to trap him. Squattin' down there in the dark, all quiet so he won't hear their bones scrapin' together—stop him, papa!"

With an apprehensive look at Ben, the farmer got down on his knees beside the little girl and put his arms around her. "Look, Sue, you're a big girl now," he argued in a gruff, coaxing voice. "It

don't do for you to talk that way. I know you're just playing, but other people don't know you so well. They might get to thinking things. You wouldn't want them to take you away from me, would you?"

And all the while she was twisting from side to side in his arms, trying to catch a glimpse of Tom over his shoulder. Suddenly, with an unexpected backward lunge, she jerked loose and ran off toward the hill. The farmer got to his feet and lumbered after her, calling, "Stop, Sue! Stop!"

Crazy as a couple of hoot owls, Ben decided, watching them go. Both of them think there's something under the ground. One says oil, the other says ghosts. You pay your money and you take your choice.

Then he noticed that during the excitement Tom had gotten to the top of the hill and had the rod up. He hurriedly sighted through the alidade, which was in the general direction of the hilltop. For some reason he couldn't see anything through it—just blackness. He felt forward to make sure the lens cover was off. He swung it around a little, hoping something hadn't dropped out of place inside the tube. Then abruptly, through it, he caught sight of Tom, and involuntarily he uttered a short, frightened cry and jumped away.

Ben's face was pale as death. He was trembling. On the hilltop, Tom was no longer in sight. Ben stood still for a moment, frozen. Then he raced off for it, running at top speed.

He found the farmer looking around perplexedly near the far fence. "Come on," Ben gasped out. "There's trouble," and vaulted over.

When they reached the hilltop, Ben stooped to the sprawling body, then recoiled with a convulsive movement and for a second time uttered a smothered cry and stood motionless. For every square inch of skin and clothes was smeared with a fine, dark-gray dust, totally different from the light-brown soil of the hilltop. And close beside Tom's lifeless hand was a tiny white bone.

Because a certain hideous vision still dominated his memory, Ben needed no one to tell him that it was a bone from a human finger. He buried his face in his hands, fighting that vision.

For what he had seen, or thought he had seen, through the alidade, had been a tiny struggling figure of Tom, buried in darkness, with dim skeletal figures clutching him all around and dragging him down into a thicker blackness.

The farmer kneeled by the body. "Dead as dead," he muttered in a hushed voice. "Just like the other. He's got the stuff fairly rubbed into him. It's even in his mouth and nose. Like he'd been buried in ashes and then dug up again."

From between the rails of the fence, the little girl stared up at them, terrified, but avid.

THE END.

FIGHTERS NEVER QUIT

By Malcolm Jameson

☉ The dead can't die—so far as we know, but there may well be yet other realms, and battles still to be fought. And if the invisible dead can see the living—

Illustrated by Kramer

Chief Bos'n Jockens was exceedingly annoyed. And as the moments slipped into the seconds, and the seconds into minutes, he became more annoyed. Chagrin was what he felt chiefly, polluted with dismay and disgust. For he was rapidly becoming convinced that he was up to his neck in a situation that simply couldn't happen—not to *anybody*, and least of all him! The bitter pill that the good chief bos'n had to swallow was this: he had become a ghost! And Jockens was one of those feet-on-the-ground people who absolutely did not believe in ghosts. His orations on the subject were well remembered in every W. O. mess in the fleet. Hence his extreme mortification.

It all came about when that big Jap battleship came barging out of the mist and let go with all she had at the already hard-pressed *El Paso*. Five sixteen shells at close range can do plenty to a light cruiser, even if the light cruiser had not already been amply riddled. The *El Paso's* reaction was the simple and obvious one—she shuddered as the lethal lumps of steel tore through her sides, then blew up with a terrific bang. What five tons of hurtling H. E. might not have completed, her own magazines did. Within five seconds all that was left of the gallant cruiser and her crew was a towering mushroom of smoke and a drizzle of splinters and fragments.

Jockens remembered that explosion vaguely, but the force of it had been too vast and so instantly applied as to give no time for sensation. He only knew that he had been hurled upward and that, without his feeling it in the least, his limbs had been ripped off him to disappear in a blast of flame. After that came a brief period when all that remained of him was a sort of disembodied consciousness hovering over a patch of flotsam in the water. Then things began to change subtly.

A couple of feet below him floated the splintered loom of an oar. Sloshing about in the water a yard away was a gruesome object which the late chief bos'n studied with a deep and morbid interest. It was horrible, that thing, being only a torn and blackened portion of a human torso to which the neck and head were still attached. But, although

it floated face down, he knew from a vivid scar on the back of the neck and a conspicuous mole on the shoulder that what he was viewing was a bit of his own mortal remains. It was that discovery that had convinced him he was dead—certainly a discovery in no way shocking, since few on the *El Paso* had expected any other outcome since their harried flight from the battle of the Banda Sea began. Jockens, in common with many of his kind, was necessarily a fatalist. What was to be would be, and he accepted the present fact with a mental shrug. But dying properly while doing his job was one thing, and the disconcerting transformation that followed it was another. Jockens most emphatically did not yearn to be a ghost and forevermore haunt the empty ocean over the spot where his ship had sunk.

Yet that was unmistakably what was about to happen. He was becoming aware of taking visible, if not tangible, shape. He now perceived that he was sitting astride that broken oar, clad in immaculate whites and wearing the ribbons of all his many badges and medals. It was a tenuous and nebulous body he was acquiring, to be sure, but yet a faithful copy of his old one. What disturbed him most was the fact that though he steadily became more and more solid to the eye, he could still see the pale shaft of the oar beneath him even though he had to stare down through his phantom abdomen to see the whole of it. And worse, the oar rose and fell as easily as if it bore no burden. On the heels of that discovery he observed a parallel phenomenon. As he himself grew in apparent solidity, the things he knew to be real grew fainter. The water which bathed his legs took on a misty, iridescent quality and he saw that it did not wet him at all. The fragment of real body paled to a blob of cloudy stuff and eventually disappeared as does a blown-out candle flame, and with it the slender apparition of the oar. In ghostland, it was beginning to be evident, things of the spirit wore the aspect of reality, while the concrete became illusions.

There was almost instant verification of that observation from all about. On every hand his