

GATEWAY

by ROBERT ARTHUR

**The little man was there all right—but
the doors he walked through weren't!**

Illustrated by Kell

HORACE GOLDER was reflecting with regret that his morning's outing was over and it was time for him to return to his apartment, his family, and Sunday dinner, when behind him he heard an iron door clang shut with a screech of rusty hinges.

He was standing on the green-sward of Central Park, watching a swan glide across the bright bosom of a pond. With the swan's shrill metallic tones ringing in his ears it did not occur to him for a moment that it was impossible for an iron door to be behind him, or any place else in the vicinity. Particularly one as large and solid as this had sounded—

Then he gave a little gasp and turned with such celerity that he slipped to one knee, getting—as Hannah would be sure to point out with acid asperity—a bad grass stain on his only good pair of trousers.

There was, of course, nothing there. For fifty yards the well-trimmed grass sloped upward to an asphalt walk. Beyond that were a group of weathered glacial rocks, some maples incandescent with the red and gold of autumn, and beyond them the façades of Fifth Avenue's great, cubelike apartment houses.

But no iron door, naturally—

Then Horace Golder gasped again, a quick, excited intake of breath. Behind their steel-rimmed spectacles, his blue eyes, washed pale by

drudging years of bookkeeping, took on a new brightness. Still on one knee, he stared at the bony hand and sinewy wrist which had appeared in the air eight feet away, on a level with his eyes.

The fingers of the hand were curled downward, as if clasped about something solid. The hand seemed to be pushing at something. Cords in the wrist stood out, indicating muscular exertion, and hinges squealed again.

The hand and wrist moved forward a foot or so, bringing into view an arm encased in a sleeve of black material that seemed to belong to an ancient frock coat.

Then, as Horace Golder's heart pounded with a queer, unnamed excitement, the fingers unclasped and the hand dropped downward. The whole arm disappeared. But even as it vanished, the individual to whom it belonged came into view.

He appeared as a man might come into sight from behind a corner or through an open door—except that there was no door. First a foot, encased in a well-patched black shoe. Then leg, knee, and—with too great a rapidity to break his appearance down into its component parts—a complete man.

The unexpectedly appearing individual was below middle height, being several inches shorter than Horace Golder, and somewhat pudgy. He was oddly attired in a frock coat



The peculiarly dressed gentleman was, obviously, stepping out of a doorway. But there was no doorway there—

of ancient cut, dark trousers equally outmoded, a stand-up collar, flowing four-in-hand tie and a somewhat shaggy beaver tophat. Strapped about his waist, outside the frock coat, was a wide belt of scuffed leather from which a great iron ring, heavy with massive old keys, hung.

HORACE GOLDER, however, focused his attention not upon the clothing but upon the wearer. The small gentleman just turning toward him had a round and rather worried countenance, thinning gray hair, and gray eyes that blinked at Horace from behind ancient hexagonal spectacles.

"Good afternoon," the little man said, bobbing his head. "Lovely weather, isn't it?"

Horace Golder automatically rose to his feet, but the other did not wait for a reply. He turned. Stooping, he reached toward the ground. His hand disappeared for a moment. Then he rose and it reappeared, now holding a large goatskin bag. This he set down at his feet, after which he fumbled at the iron ring attached to his belt, with some difficulty at last detaching a large rusty key.

With the key in his hand, he appeared to take hold of something beside him and push. Hinges squealed again, metal clashed on metal, and metallic overtones filled the air with echoes.

"*Whew!*" The frock-coated little man let out a long breath. "These old hinges do rust up. Soon fix that, though."

He bent over his goatskin bag, loosened a drawstring, plunged his hand in, and brought out an iron hammer and a small pottery jug with a long pointed snout.

Thrusting the hammer into his belt, he moved a few feet to his left and lifted the jar upward to a point above his head. There he tipped it.

A little oil spilled outward. Horace Golder heard the clay chink against iron, and the spill of oil ceased, though the jar was tilted farther and held there for several seconds.

The little man repeated the process at two other points directly below the first, and replaced the jug in the goatskin sack.

"There!" He straightened with an air of satisfaction. "That'll fix 'em. They'll work easy next time, though for the life of me I don't know of anybody who'll be wanting to use this door."

He glanced at Horace Golder, as if expecting a suggestion, but Horace, in his surprise, merely shook his head as if to indicate that he had no idea either.

He brought out the key and inserted it into an imaginary—at least, an invisible—keyhole. A twist, and the key turned. Horace Golder heard a large metal tongue click home. The little man put the key back on the ring at his waist and seized hold of something that, by the way his hands curved about it, might have been a large ring bolt. Alternately he jerked and thrust. A faint metallic rattling answered his efforts.

Satisfied, he desisted, and with a large green handkerchief taken from the breast pocket of his frock coat, wiped his pink brow.

"There," he sighed, "that's five looked at. One more, and I'm going to eat. They can't begrudge me *that!*" The little man cast a dark look toward the invisible door. "If I don't finish them all today, I don't finish, and that's all there is to it. Ritual or no ritual, stars or no stars, a man can only do so much in one day. And if another twenty years has to pass, let it, I say. There's no hurry."

With that he bent and hoisted the

goatskin bag to his shoulders. It was obviously heavy, for the weight of it made him stoop. Horace Golder swallowed hard, and tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Let me help you," he suggested. "Just out for the air—little exercise won't hurt—do me good—don't get nearly enough—"

The little man removed the sack from his shoulder with alacrity.

"Well," he began, "it's a bit heavy, what with my tools and oil cans and lunch, and what not. But if you're sure—"

Horace Golder settled that by taking the sack.

THEY FOLLOWED as straight a line as the topography of Central Park would permit. Horace Golder's companion cut cheerfully across the grass while Horace, brought up with a great respect for rules and regulations, kept an apprehensive eye open for minions of the law.

It was at a point a couple of hundred yards west of the Metropolitan Museum that Horace Golder's guide came to a halt. Horace, too winded with the weight of the sack to speak, dropped it with a sigh of relief to the grass. The bag emitted mysterious clanking sounds and subsided. The little man bent over it, drew out the oil jar again, and from his belt plucked the hammer.

"First," he announced aloud, "to see if there's any weak spots. These old doors do rust a bit, you know."

Grasping the hammer firmly, he struck at various points in the empty—to Horace Golder, at least—air between two towering elms. A great clangor filled the air—the rolling reverberations of iron clashing on iron, so loud and thunderous that Horace jumped and looked about fearfully.

The noise seemed to attract no attention from the few distant stroll-

ers, however, and a moment later the little man shoved the hammer back into his belt.

"Sound," he said cheerily. "Sound as the day Alfgar forged it. There was a man, Alfgar. If anybody nowadays had one tenth his brains—"

He shook his head, as if to imply much he did not care to put into words.

"Now to see if she'll open," he announced, and extracted another weighty key from his ring. He shoved this forward, twisted it, and again Horace heard bolts slide back.

The little man, leaving the key to hang there, as it seemed, in the empty air, grasped an invisible lever, turned it, and pulled. He moved backward a few steps. The key followed him. There was only a faint squeal of hinges. The frock-coated man stopped pulling and looked, pleased, toward Horace.

"Well!" he said, "that one was easy. I'll give it a bit of oil—not because it needs it, but so no one can say I'm skimping my duty."

He took up the spouted jar and applied it.

"There, that's done," he stated. "And now I'm going to eat. I said I would when I finished this one, and I shall. We'll leave it open till after. Let the oil soak into the pins. And besides, I like to watch the pretty creatures play as I sup."

He plumped himself down on the grass and glanced up, inquiringly.

"Will you join me in my victuals?" he asked. "Today I have aplenty. Fixed them myself. *Those* ones"—he jerked his head over his shoulder as Horace Golder quickly seated himself, all thought of Hannah and dinner having fled—"they don't care if a hard-working man goes hungry. All they think about is dancing and singing and games all day."

He pulled the goatskin sack to-

ward him. From it he took a parcel wrapped in linen. Unwrapped, he revealed a stone flask, a fine brazen bowl, lidded, which proved to be filled with fruit. Horace could not put a name to, and a small hamper containing a cold fowl that had been, by the marks, roasted on a spit.

With an odd, bronze-colored knife he cut the fowl in half and on the point held out one segment.

"China pheasant," he announced, "from Queen Halimar's own gardens. With pomegranates and rose wine, just right for a little outing such as this. A bit coarse, but the exercise gives one an appetite."

He placed his beaver hat on the ground beside him, tucked a square of linen into his collar, and seized his half of fowl in both hands. Beaming at Horace Golder, he set to work with hearty appetite.

"They *are* gay creatures," he murmured, swallowing a bite of pheasant and loosening his grip on the bird's carcass to gesture with one hand at a point beyond them. "But it does one's heart good to see them dancing among the fountains. Seventy-seven fountains there are, and seventy-seven maidens in Queen Halimar's retinue. Every one of them more lovely than Helen or Guinivere, every one wearing silks of a different color. With the sun making rainbows in the spray of the fountains, the strings and brasses of the musicians tinkling, the peacocks strutting in their pride and the fawns nibbling at the grass beneath the yew trees—"

He shook his head and tackled the pheasant again.

"Is it not a fair sight?" he asked. "Do the fountains not make sweet music? The breeze is blowing this way, bringing their tune to us. And the scent of the honeysuckle and the violets."

Horace Golder found himself trembling slightly, so intently was he trying to see what his companion saw. Nothing was there, however, nothing but the massive masonry of the museum, the trees, the blue sky beyond, a few wind-spun clouds.

But if his eyes could see nothing, his ears and nose were more successful. There *was* a breeze blowing softly in their faces. And riding on it came a faint, far tinkling, silvery and sweet, as if the wind itself were plucking the strings of a hundred lutes, while, strong and heady, the scent of honeysuckle and violets reached his nostrils.

HORACE GOLDER breathed deep. He closed his ears to the raucous honking of taxis on Fifth Avenue, to the scream of clashing gears; closed his nostrils to the smell of gasoline fumes, and for the moment was aware only of the sweet, distant tinkling of falling water, the soft scent of flowers.

He shut his eyes, and girls' voices came to him—faint and faraway—filled with mirth and laughter.

"A pretty sight." His companion's voice caused him to open his eyes again, and he found that the little man was holding out a golden goblet filled with rose-colored wine. "They don't know what work means. But it doesn't matter. I can worry about that. That's why I'm Queen Halimar's steward. To attend to just such things as minding the gates and keeping the accounts, casting horoscopes and reading runes, following the stars and working such small magics as may be called for."

Horace took the wine, touched it to his lips, and with the first taste youth seemed to flow through him. He leaned back against the trunk of a young elm. Throwing back his head, he quaffed the cupful. In

stantly his veins were singing, and delight like a young man's first knowledge of love suffused him.

"I have never drunk such wine," he acknowledged solemnly, setting down the empty goblet. "In fact, I have seldom drunk wine at all. My wife does not approve. It is a bad example, she says, for the children. But"—and Horace Golder shook his head—"I sometimes think, though they *are* my children, that any example, however good, is completely wasted upon them. I do not really care—"

He had been about to say that he did not really like his children, or his wife either, in his heart, but realized in time what he was saying and caught himself with a sense of shock. It was not a thing a man could well say to a stranger, or even think to himself—at least, Horace Golder couldn't.

His companion nodded knowingly.

"My wife, too, God bless her, frowned upon the brimming cup. But otherwise she was amiability itself. I have not married again, though Queen Halimar has offered me the choice of all her maidens, each of whom is more fair than the others."

He passed the brazen bowl of pomegranates, and Horace Golder, busy upon the cold fowl, took one.

"Excuse me," the little man said with sudden contrition. "I have not told my name. I am Fuliman, steward to Queen Halimar, Court Astrologer, Minder of the Gates, and Royal Librarian."

"I'm Horace Golder," Horace answered, his tongue the slightest bit thick. "I'm an accountant. I live over there"—he waved his hand—"on East Ninetieth Street. I have a wife and two children. The reason I'm here today is because every Sunday when the weather is good I come over to the park to be alone for

a while. I got my doctor to tell my wife I had to walk, for the exercise."

"Horacegolder," Fuliman repeated the appellation. "It is a good name. It would go well with magic working and casting runes. You are a young man, too, and well-favored, yet withal having an air of soberness and reliability. Eh, well, have more rose wine."

HORACE GOLDER drank again, and ate, and all the many questions that had trembled on his tongue from the moment Fuliman first appeared somehow were forgotten. His companion was unhurried and as they sat there in the late autumn sun time passed like a song. Above Horace's head an old iron key still hung in emptiness, to attract a curious glance from a passerby, if there had been any. But none troubled them. They ate and drank, and the breeze that caressed their brows brought still the faraway tinkling of many fountains and the scent of flowers, and occasionally carried to their ears the clash of metal on metal, the neighing of a stallion, or the measured clangor of a great brass gong.

"They are jousting beyond the castle," Fuliman remarked. "The nobles, twenty in black armor on black stallions against twenty in white armor on white stallions. It is a fine spectacle to watch, and sometimes from my room in the south tower I look down upon the tourney field through my viewing glasses. It makes me feel much like a god, to gaze down upon the bright fair land, the fluttering pennants, the prancing horses, and the clashing knights."

"There are other sports, too," he went on, biting thoughtfully into a pomegranate, "in which I once took part. Boar hunting in the queen's

forest, and falconing over the downs and meadows. But I stick close to my books now, for my joints have lost their suppleness and I take less delight in games.

"I— But, by the beard of Alfgar, the day has almost passed and there is still the seventh gate to be seen to! Come, friend Horacegolder, we must hurry. Wait here a moment while I fetch water for washing."

Fuliman scrambled to his feet. Seizing up the brass bowl that had held the pomegranates, he strode forward—and vanished. Horace blinked. Fuliman was gone. But on the grass still lay the goatskin bag, the remnants of a meal—

Then Fuliman had returned. He stood before Horace and held in both hands the brass bowl, filled now with water.

"Wash," he invited. "I'll gather up my things."

Horace plunged both hands to the wrist in the clear cold water, and electricity seemed to run up his arms. He removed his spectacles and splashed the liquid on his face. His skin tingled, grew firmer. He could feel the lines in his cheeks and brow iron out.

He gazed at his reflection in the water, and the face of a young man looked back at him. Then with a square of linen as soft as rose petals he dried himself. When he had replaced his glasses he viewed again his image in the bowl, and saw that he looked now like Horace Golder, harassed accountant. But for just a moment he had been twenty again—

Fuliman took the bowl, tossed out the remaining water, thrust it into the goatskin sack.

"Almost sundown," he muttered in evident agitation. "It would not do, it would not do at all, for the

setting sun to catch me. Now, where is that key? I was certain—"

Horace Golder pointed.

"There," he said. Fuliman looked up, and nodded. With one hand he swung shut the iron door that Horace could not see. The familiar clang of metal on metal followed his thrust. Fuliman turned the key, and bolts slid home.

"There," he said, "that one's finished with. Now just one more, the last—the one I always hate to do. The seventh gate. If you—"

But Horace had already shouldered the sack. Fuliman set off northward again, the keys at his belt jangling merrily. Horace Golder followed, a spring in his legs that had not been present for years.

PRESENTLY, beyond the Metropolitan, Fuliman turned to the east. He continued that way until they were out of the park and had crossed Fifth Avenue. For the first time that afternoon they were among other persons. But the few people strolling on the avenue were homeward bound, and Fuliman's antiquated formal attire attracted slight attention.

The shadows were lengthening down the side streets that they crossed, going northward again. Across the park the sun was dropping redly toward the serried cliffs of apartment houses. Fuliman broke into a dogtrot. Horace kept at his heels. They crossed Eighty-eighth Street, and continued on to Ninetieth Street. Then Fuliman swung right.

For some reason he could not fathom, Horace Golder felt choked by a queer, electric excitement. They were hurrying now in the direction of his own apartment, just east of Lexington Avenue. Hannah would be waiting for him, her tongue

sharpened on the grindstone of her impatience, but he did not care. He had hardly a thought for her as he hastened after the odd little man in the frock coat.

Fuliman came to a stop on the pavement, on the far side of Lexington Avenue, having narrowly escaped being run down by a truck. He mopped his brow in agitation with his green handkerchief.

"Things have indeed changed," he gasped to Horace. "It's worth a man's life to venture out into a road. I would not be caught here by the setting sun for all the treasure of lost Cathay. You can understand why I leave this one until the last, and would omit it altogether if I could."

"Is it . . . is it close?" Horace Golder found himself impelled to ask.

"Fifty paces," Fuliman answered, and Horace Golder made a quick estimate. Fifty paces would bring them directly in front of his apartment house—

They did. And there Fuliman paused, his round face troubled.

"It's awkward," he muttered, mopping his features again. "Most awkward."

"You . . . you have to go inside?" Horace asked, the words coming with difficulty.

Fuliman nodded. "It makes it most difficult," he said, his voice unhappy. "The last two inspections I was at my wit's end. In fact, last time I was forced to omit it altogether and hurry back to the sixth gate. I barely made it. The sun was so nearly down—"

He shuddered slightly.

"And I haven't the faintest idea—"

"It's perfectly all right," Horace Golder interrupted boldly. "I live here. In the front ground-floor apart-

ment. That's the one you mean, isn't it? I'll let you in."

He led the way into the ground-floor hall of the old brownstone building and paused outside his own apartment door. He listened, but could catch no sound indicating that his wife was within.

REASSURED, he unlocked the door and led Fuliman into the living room, which looked out on the sidewalk. Fuliman gazed about him with an expression of relief.

"A quarter of the hour," he commented, glancing at Horace's electric mantel clock. "And today the sun sets at five. Time sufficient, but I must move this."

Horace seized hold of the old mohair sofa Fuliman indicated and yanked it into the center of the room, with scant regard for Hannah's passion for neatness. Fuliman nodded, and took from his ring a pair of keys, smaller than the previous ones had been.

One he thrust into a spot some two feet from Horace's flowered wallpaper. Bolts clicked, and Fuliman pulled. Hinges made protest.

"No oil for forty years. They're tight and rusty," the little man muttered, and made haste to apply the oil jar.

"Give them a moment to let the oil soak in," he said aloud, "and they'll be less noisy— Back!" he interrupted himself. "Back, girl!"

He was apparently addressing the wall. But something, coming from nowhere, struck Horace Golder lightly on the forehead and dropped to the rug, where it gleamed with a milky, luminous glow that shed light for inches about it.

"The minx is being playful," Fuliman said indulgently. "She was passing as I opened the gate, and is

coquetting with you. It is a pearl she has tossed at you."

Horace stooped to pick up the milky object. It was as large as a pigeon's egg, glowing with the pure-white sheen of the finest Oriental pearls. He weighed it in his palm, and its beauty took his breath away.

"She's signaling you to toss it back," Fuliman smiled. "But you might as well keep it. She has dozens more."

"No," Horace Golder answered. "I'll give it back if she wants it."

And he stepped forward, thrusting out his hand, the pearl balanced on his palm.

He half expected his hand to vanish, but it did not. The pearl did, however. Unseen fingers brushed against his with a soft, warm, clinging touch. Playfully they tried to pull him forward. Horace Golder, startled, withdrew his hand hastily. The pearl did not reappear.

Fuliman, who had been gazing at him, nodded as if reaching a decision.

"Horacegolder," he said, "an idea has come to me. I am growing old, and have served as steward for a good hundred years. It is time I had my days to myself. I need an assistant who can keep the books and attend to the business affairs of the kingdom. You impress me as sober, industrious, yet withal a man well suited to the life in our kingdom. Come with me now, and I shall train you to fulfill my duties. They will not be onerous. You will have much time in which to follow your own pursuits—"

Horace Golder gaped at him, and as the full purport of Fuliman's words came to him, his face twisted with urgent longing. But he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I can't. I'm married, you know. Hannah—"

"No matter," Fuliman told him.

"You may take any one of Halimar's seventy-seven maidens to wife, if that is all that troubles you. Or none, if you prefer your books better."

Soft laughter reached Horace Golder's ears. The scent of violets and honeysuckle filled the room. But still he shook his head, for it is not easy to discard the ideas of a lifetime.

"No," he said, and his voice was wistful. "I . . . I can't. It wouldn't be the right thing—"

Fuliman nodded, but of the two keys he held, put only one back on the ring at his belt.

"Horacegolder," he directed, "take this key. If, before the sun descends beyond the horizon you change your mind, use it to unlock this gate. I will wait in the grounds beyond. If it opens, I will welcome you. If it does not—but you must choose. With the key in your hand you can step through, if you will it."

Then Fuliman took the goatskin sack up on his shoulder and turned.

"Good-by, Horagegolder," he said, and took a forward step. As a man might vanish through an open door he vanished, and a moment later the dull resonance of iron on iron, of bolts sliding to, echoed about the room.

ALMOST stupidly Horace Golder stood there, staring at the spot where the little man had been, the rough key cold in his fingers. How long he stood he did not know, though it may have been for several minutes. It was the sound of his wife's voice in the hall that startled him into motion.

"Horace!" Hannah's tone was charged with irritation. "Are you in there, Horace? Open the door for me. I'm worn out."

Horace started, and cast a quick glance toward the door.

"Horace!" Hannah's voice was shrill. "Open the door!"

Horace moved, not toward the door, but toward the spot where Fuliman had been. The iron key trembled in his fingers as he reached out and felt a cold metal surface, studded with bolt heads. He found a keyhole. His fingers were as stiff as clothespins as he thrust the key into the orifice.

He twisted at the key, his breath coming in quick, short gasps, and felt it give. His hand found a rough ring bolt. He tugged. Weight gave way, moved toward him.

"Horace!" His wife had used her own latchkey, and the apartment door flew open. "Horace! What are you doing?"

Her voice was so charged with angry command that Horace Golder could not help turning, as he always did when she spoke so. She was standing in the doorway, gazing at him, the two children behind her, their sharp young faces as unpleasant as her sharp older one.

For a moment the command in her voice held him in a species of paralysis, unable to move. And in that moment the hands of the electric clock on the mantel indicated just exactly the hour of five. Five deep gong notes, muted as though coming from a great, an unguessable distance, made quivery echoes in the room. And while the fifth still shivered in the air, something behind Horace clattered sharply to the floor.

He whirled, stared down. It was the key. The iron key Fuliman had left him. The key which had opened the seventh gateway, beyond which Fuliman had promised to wait. It had fallen— Horace Golder thrust out a trembling hand. Wildly he felt

for a door, unseen, but hard, cold, solid— And his frantic fingers encountered nothing. *Nothing*—

Then he remembered. Sundown. It had something to do with sundown. And today, Fuliman had said, sundown was at five. Which had just struck. Had struck and passed him by—

Then Horace Golder knew what had happened. Calm replaced the momentary chaos of his thoughts. His wife was staring at him almost as if in fright.

"Horace, you're drunk!" she cried wrathfully. "Drunk and messing up the apartment! Where have you been all day? What have you been doing? Answer me, Horace! Account for yourself. What? What did you mumble just then?"

Horace passed a hand across his forehead. Suddenly he was tired. Very tired. He gave a little sigh. And then he managed a smile.

He stooped, picked up the rusty, ancient key that lay on the floor. For an instant, as he touched it, faintly to his nostrils came the scent of honeysuckle and violets. Then he thrust it into his pocket, and with his fingers still touching its comforting solidity, he turned again toward Hannah.

"I only said, my dear," he murmured, "that it just occurred to me that in twenty years I will still be only fifty-six."

"Fifty-six!" his wife snorted. "And what is going to happen when you're fifty-six?"

Horace Golder shook his head, and behind their spectacles his faded blue eyes were bright.

"I don't know," he told her. "But something exciting will, I'm sure. I have a feeling— And now, my dear, may I help you off with your things?"

Frederic Sturgeon

"DERM FOOL"

By THEODORE STURGEON

It wasn't exactly a disease—but it was annoying to have to collect the arms and legs and torsos every day—

Illustrated by M. Isip

I AM NOT generally a fussy man. A bit of litter around my two-and-a-half-room dugout on the West Side seldom bothers me. What trash that isn't big enough to be pushed out in the hallway can be kicked around till it gets lost. But today was different. Myra was coming, and I couldn't have Myra see the place this way.

Not that she cared particularly. She knew me well enough by this time not to mind. But the particular *kind* of litter might be a bit—disturbing.

After I had swept the floor I began looking in odd corners. I didn't want any vagrant breeze to send unexplainable evidence fluttering out into the midst of the room—not while Myra was there. Thinking about her, I was almost tempted to leave one of the things where she could see it. She was generally so imperturbable—it might be amusing to see her hysterical.

I put the unchivalrous thought from me. Myra had always been very decent to me. I was a bit annoyed at her for making me like her so much when she was definitely not my type. Crawling under the bed, I found my slippers. My feet were still in them. I set one on top of the mantel and went into the other room, where I could sit down and wrench the foot out of the other slipper. They were odd slippers; the left was much bigger than the right.

I swore and tugged at that right foot. It came out with a rustle; I rolled it up in a ball and tossed it into the waste-paper basket. Now let's see—oh, yes, there was a hand still clutching the handle of one of the bureau drawers. I went and pried it off. Why the deuce hadn't Myra called me up instead of wiring? No chance to head her off now. She'd just drift in, as usual. And me with all this on my mind—

I got the index finger off the piano and threw it and the left foot away, too. I wondered if I should get rid of the torso hanging in the hall closet, but decided against it. That was a fine piece. I might be able to make something good out of it; a suitcase, perhaps, or a rainproof sports jacket. Now that I had all this raw material, I might as well turn it to my advantage.

I checked carefully. My feet were gone, so I wouldn't have to worry about them until the morning. My right hand, too; that was good. It would be awful to shake hands with Myra and have her find herself clinging to a disembodied hand. I pulled at the left. It seemed a little loose, but I didn't want to force it. This wasn't a painful disease as long as you let it have its own way. My face would come off any minute now. I'd try not to laugh too much; maybe I could keep it on until she had gone.

I put both hands around my