

The Man From the Atom

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Published: 1926

Category(s): Fiction, Science Fiction, Short Stories, Fantasy

Source: The Internet Archive <http://archive.org/details/AmazingStoriesVolume01Number01>

About Wertebaker:

American science fiction author, journalist, technical writer, editor (*Fortune* and *Time*) and naval seaman during World War II.

Also available on Feedbooks Wertebaker:

- *The Coming of the Ice* (1961)
- *The Chamber of Life* (1929)

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Preface

This was one of the 6 science fiction stories published in the first issue (April 1926) of the first magazine devoted to science fiction, *Amazing Stories*, edited and published by Hugo Gernsback, now considered to be the father of the science fiction genre. He described this story in an inset panel:

"In 'Alice in the Looking Glass', the beautiful play of fancy which gave immortal fame to a logician and mathematician, we read of the mysterious change in size of the heroine, the charming little Alice. It tells how she grew large and small according to what she ate. But here we have increase in size pushed to its utmost limit. Here we have treated the growth of a man to cosmic dimensions. And we are told of his strange sensation and are led up to a sudden startling and impressive conclusion, and are taken through the picture of his emotions and despair."

The reader with even the most basic knowledge of science will find this story flawed, incredible, perhaps ludicrous. But, after all, it's fiction, more fantasy than science. Suspend your disbelief and let the story carry you where it will, across space and time, to love.

Part 1

Chapter 1

I AM a lost soul, and I am homesick. Yes, homesick. Yet how vain is homesickness when one is without a home! I can but be sick for a home that has gone. For my home departed millions of years ago, and there is now not even a trace of its former existence. Millions of years ago, I say, in all truth and earnestness. But I must tell the tale—though there is no man left to understand it.

I well remember that morning when my friend, Professor Martyn, called me to him on a matter of the greatest importance. I may explain that the Professor was one of those mysterious outcasts, geniuses whom Science would not recognize because they scorned the pettiness of the men who represented Science. Martyn was first of all a scientist, but almost as equally he was a man of intense imagination, and where the ordinary man crept along from detail to detail and required a complete model before being able to visualize the results of his work, Professor Martyn first grasped the great results of his contemplated work, the vast, far-reaching effects, and then built with the end in view.

The Professor had few friends. Ordinary men avoided him because they were unable to understand the greatness of his vision. Where he plainly saw pictures of worlds and universes, they vainly groped among pictures of his words on printed pages. That was their impression of a word. A group of letters. His was of the picture it presented in his mind. I, however, though I had not the slightest claim to scientific knowledge, was romantic to a high degree, and always willing to carry out his strange experiments for the sake of the adventure and the strangeness of it all. And so the advantages were equal. I had a mysterious personage ready to furnish me with the unusual. He had a willing subject to try out his inventions, for he reasoned quite naturally that should he himself perform the

experiments, the world would be in danger of losing a mentality it might eventually have need of.

And so it was that I hurried to him without the slightest hesitation upon that, to me, momentous day of days in my life. I little realized the great change that soon would come over my existence, yet I knew that I was in for an adventure, certainly startling, possibly fatal. I had no delusions concerning my luck.

I found Professor Martyn in his laboratory bending, with the eyes of a miser counting his gold, over a tiny machine that might easily have fitted in my pocket. He did not see me for a moment, but when he finally looked up with a sigh of regret that he must tear his eyes away from his new and wonderful brain-child, whatever it might be, he waved me a little unsteadily into a chair, and sank down in one himself, with the machine in his lap. I waited, placing myself in what I considered a receptive mood.

"Kirby," he began abruptly at last, "have you ever read your Alice in Wonderland?" I gasped, perhaps, in my surprise.

"Alice in—! are you joking, Professor?"

"Certainly not," he assured me. "I speak in all seriousness."

"Why, yes, I have read it many times. In fact, it has always struck me as a book to appeal more to an adult than to a child. But what—I can't see just how that is important." He smiled.

"Perhaps I am playing with you unduly," he said, "but do you remember the episode of the two pieces of cheese, if my own recollection is correct, one of which made one grow, the other shrink?"

I assented. "But," I said incredulously, "certainly you cannot tell me you have spent your time in preparing magical cheeses?" He laughed aloud this time, and then, seeing my discomfort, unburdened himself of his latest triumph.

"No Kirby, not just that, but I have indeed constructed a machine that you will be incapable of believing until you try it. With this little object in my lap, you could grow forever, until there was nothing left in the universe to surpass. Or you could shrink so as to observe the minutest of atoms, standing upon it as you now stand upon the earth. It is an invention that will make scientific knowledge perfect!" He halted with flushed face and gleaming eyes. I could find nothing

to say, for the thing was colossal, magnificent in its possibilities. If it worked. But I could not resist a suspicion of so tiny a machine.

"Professor, are you in absolute earnest?" I cried.

"Have I ever jested about so wonderful a thing?" he retorted quietly. I knew he had not.

"But surely that is merely a model?"

"It is the machine itself!"

Chapter 2

I was too astounded to speak at first. But finally, "Tell me about it," I gasped. "This is certainly the most fantastic invention you have made yet! How does it work?"

"I am afraid," suggested Professor Martyn, "that you could not understand all the technical details. It is horribly complicated. And besides, I am anxious to try it out. But I will give you an idea of it.

"Of course, you know that an object may be divided in half forever, as you have learned in high school, without being entirely exhausted. It is this principle that is used in shrinking. I hardly understand the thing's mechanism myself—it was the result of an accident—but I know that the machine not only divides every atom, every molecule, every electron of the body into two exactly equal parts, but it accomplishes the same feat in itself, thus keeping pace with its manipulator. The matter it removes from the body is reduced to a gaseous form, and left in the air. There are six wires that you do not see, which connect with the body, while the machine itself is placed on the chest, held by a small belt that carries wires to the front of the body where the two controlling buttons are placed. "When the user wishes to grow, he presses the upper button, and the machine then extracts atoms from the air which it converts, by a reverse method from the first, into atoms identical to certain others in the body, the two atoms thus formed joining into one large particle of twice the original size.

"As I said, I have little idea of my invention except that it works by means of atomic energy. I was intending to make an atomic energy motor, when I observed certain parts to increase and diminish strangely in size. It was practically by blind instinct that I have worked the thing up. And now I fear I shall not be able to discover the source of my atomic energy until I can put together, with great

care, another such machine, for I am afraid to risk taking this apart for analysis."

"And I," I said suddenly, with the awe I felt for such a discovery quite perceptible, I fear, in my tone, "I am to try out this machine?"

"If you are willing," he said simply. "You must realize, of course, that there are a multitude of unknown dangers. I know nothing of the complete effects of the machine. But my experiments on inanimate objects have seemed satisfactory."

"I am willing to take any risks," I said enthusiastically, "If you are willing to risk your great machine. Why, don't you realize, Professor, that this will revolutionize Science? There is nothing, hardly, that will be unknown. Astronomy will be complete, for there will be nothing to do but to increase in size enough to observe beyond our atmosphere, or one could stand upon worlds like rocks to examine others."

"Exactly. I have calculated that the effect of a huge foot covering whole countries would be slight, so equally distributed would the weights be. Probably it would rest upon tall buildings and trees with ease. But in space, of course, no support should be necessary.

"And then, as you said, one could shrink until the mysteries of electrons would be revealed. Of course, there would be danger in descending into apparent nothingness, not knowing where a new world-atom could be found upon which to stand. But dangers must be risked."

"But now, Kirby," remarked the Professor officially, "time passes, and I should like you to make your little journey soon that I may quickly know its results. Have you any affairs you would like to put in order, in case—"

"None," I said. I was always ready for these experiments. And though this promised to be magnificently momentous, I was all ready. "No, if I return in a few hours, I shall find everything all right. If not, I am still prepared." He beamed in approval.

"Fine. Of course you understand that our experiment must take place at some secluded spot. If you are ready, we can proceed at once to a country laboratory of mine that will, I think, be safe."

I assented, and we hastily donned our overcoats, the Professor spending a moment or two collecting some necessary apparatus.

Then we packed the machine in a safe box, and left his home.

"Are you all ready, Kirby?" The Professor's voice was firm, but my practiced ear could detect the slightest vibrations that indicated to me his intense inner feelings. I hesitated a moment. I was not afraid of going. Never that. But there seemed something partaking almost of finality about this departure. It was different from anything I had ever felt before.

"All ready, Professor," I said cheerfully after a brief moment.

"Are you going to magnify or minimize yourself?"

"It shall be growth," I answered, without a moment's hesitation there. The stars, and what lay beyond... . It was that I cared for. The Professor looked at me earnestly, deeply engrossed in thought.

Finally he said, "Kirby, if you are to make an excursion into interstellar space, you realize that not only would you freeze to death, but also die from lack of air."

Walking to a cabinet in the rear of the room, he opened it and withdrew from it some strange looking paraphernalia. "This," he said, holding up a queer looking suit, "is made of a great quantity of interlocking metal cells, hermetically sealed, from which the air has been completely exhausted so as to give the cells a high vacuum. These separate cells are then woven into the fabric. When you wear this suit, you will, in fact, be enclosed in a sort of thermos bottle. No heat can leave this suit, and the most intensive cold cannot penetrate through it."

I quickly got into the suit, which was not as heavy as one might imagine. It covered not only the entire body, but the feet and hands as well, the hand part being a sort of mitten.

After I had gotten into the suit, the Professor placed over my head a sort of transparent dome which he explained was made of strong unbreakable bakelite. The globe itself really was made of several globes, one within the other. The globes only touched at the lower rim. The interstices where the globes did not touch formed a vacuum, the air having been drawn from the spaces. Consequently heat could not escape from the transparent head piece nor could the cold come in. From the back of this head gear, a flexible tube led into the interior; this tube being connected to a small compressed oxygen tank, which the Professor strapped to my back.

He then placed the wonder machine with its row of buttons on my chest, and connected the six wires to the arms and other parts of my body. Professor Martyn grasped my hand then, and said in his firm, quiet voice:

"Then goodbye, Kirby, for awhile. Press the first button when you are ready to go. May the Fates be with you!"

Chapter 3

The Professor next placed the transparent head gear over my head and secured it with attachments to my vacuum suit. A strange feeling of quietness and solitude came over me. While I could still see the Professor, I could hear him talk no longer as sounds cannot pierce a vacuum. Once more the Professor shook my hand warmly.

Then, somehow, I found myself pressing down the uppermost of three buttons. Instantly there was a tingling, electric flash all through my body. Martyn, trees, distant buildings, all seemed to shoot away into nothingness. Almost in panic, I pushed the middle button. I stopped. I could not help it, for this disappearing of all my world acted upon my consciousness. I had a strange feeling that I was leaving forever.

I looked down; and Professor Martyn, a tiny speck in an automobile far below, waved up to me cheerfully as he started his car and began to speed away. He was fleeing the immediate danger of my growth, when my feet would begin to cover an immense area, until I could be almost entirely in space. I gathered my courage quickly, fiercely, and pressed the top button again. Once more the earth began to get smaller, little by little, but faster. A tingling sensation was all over me, exhilarating if almost painful where the wires were connected upon my forearms, my legs, about the forehead, and upon my chest.

It did never seem as though I was changing, but rather that the world was shrinking away, faster and faster. The clouds were falling upon me with threatening swiftness, until my head broke suddenly through them, and my body was obscured, and the earth below, save tiny glimpses, as though of a distant landscape through a fog. Far away I could see a few tall crags that broke through even as had

I, scorning from their majestic height the world below. Now indeed, if never before, was my head "among the clouds!"

But even the clouds were going. I began to get an idea of the earth as a great ball of thick cloud. There was a pricking sensation beneath my feet, as though I stood upon pine needles. It gave me a feeling of power to know that these were trees and hills.

I began to feel insecure, as though my support were doing something stealthy beneath me. Have you ever seen an elephant perform upon a little rolling ball? Well that is how I felt. The earth was rotating, while I no longer could move upon it. While I pondered, watching in some alarm as it became more and more like a little ball a few feet thick, it took matters in its own hand. My feet slipped off, suddenly, and I was lying absolutely motionless, powerless to move, in space!

I watched the earth awhile as it shrank, and even observed it now as it moved about the sun. I could see other planets that had grown at first a trifle larger and were now getting smaller again, about the same size as the earth, tiny balls of no more than a couple of inches in diameter... .

It was getting much darker. The sun no longer gave much light, for there was no atmosphere to diffuse it. It was a great blinding ball of fire near my feet now, and the planets were traveling about it swiftly. I could see the light reflected on one side, dark on the other, on each planet. The sun could be seen to move perceptibly too, though very slightly. As my feet grew larger, threatening to touch it, I hastily drew them up with ease and hung suspended in the sky in a half-sitting position as I grew.

Turning my head away all at once, I observed in some surprise that some of the stars were growing larger, coming nearer and nearer. For a time I watched their swift approach, but they gradually seemed to be getting smaller rather than larger. I looked again at my own system. To my amazement, it had moved what seemed about a yard from its former position, and was much smaller. The planets I saw no longer, but there were faint streaks of light in circles about the sun, and I understood that these were the tracks of the worlds that now moved about their parent too swiftly to be followed with the eye.

I could see all the stars moving hither and yon now, although they still continued to appear closer and closer together. I found a number lying practically on the plane of my chest, but above that they seemed to cease. I could now see no planets, only the tiny sun moving farther and farther, faster and faster along its path. I could discern, it seemed to me, a trend in its and its companions' path. For on one side they seemed to be going one way, and the opposite way on the other. In front, they seemed to move across my vision. Gradually I came to understand that this was a great circle swinging vastly about me, faster and faster.

I had grown until the stars were circling now about my legs. I seemed to be the center of a huge vortex. And they were coming closer and closer together, as though to hem me about. Yet I could not move all of me away. I could only move my limbs and head in relation to my stationary body. The nearest star, a tiny bright speck, was a few yards away. My own sun was like a bright period upon a blackboard. But the stars were coming nearer and nearer. It seemed necessary for me to move somehow, so I drew my legs up and shot them out with all my force. I began to move slowly away, having acted upon what little material substance there was in the ether.

The stars were soon only a few feet apart below me, then a few inches, and suddenly, looking out beyond them, I was struck with the fact that they seemed to be a great group, isolated from a number of far distant blotches that were apart from these. The stars were moving with incredible swiftness now about a center near which was what I imagined to be the sun, though I had lost track of it somehow. They merged closer and closer together, the vast group shrunk more and more, until finally they had become indistinguishable as entities. They were all part of a huge cloud now, that seemed somehow familiar. What did it suggest? It was pale, diffused at the ends, but thick and white in the center, like a nebula—a nebula! That was it! A great light broke over me. All these stars were part of a great system that formed a nebula. It explained the mystery of the nebulae.

And there were now other nebulae approaching, as this grew smaller. They took on the resemblance of stars, and they began to repeat the process of closing in as the stars had done. The stars, universes within universes! And those universes but nebulae in

another great universe! Suddenly I began to wonder. Could there be nothing more in infinity than universe after universe, each a part of another greater one? So it would seem. Yet the spell was upon me and I was not ready to admit such simplicity yet. I must go on. And my earth! It could not even be found, this sphere that had itself seemed almost the universe.

But my growth was terribly fast now. The other nebulae were merging, it would seem at first, upon me. But my slow progress through space became faster as I grew larger, and even as they came upon me, like flying arrows now, I shot above them. Then they, too, merged. The result was a vast nucleus of glowing material.

A great light began to grow all about me. Above I suddenly observed, far away, a huge brightness that seemed to extend all over the universe. But it began definitely. It was as though one were in a great ball, and the nebulae, a sunlike body now, were in the center. But as I became larger with every instant, the roof-like thing diffused, even as before things had converged, and formed into separate bodies, like stars. I passed through them finally, and they came together again behind me as I shot away, another great body.

A coincidence suddenly struck me. Was not this system of a great ball effect with a nucleus within similar to what the atom was said to be? Could the nucleus and its great shell be opposite poles of electrical energy, then? In other words, was this an electron —a huge electron composed of universes? The idea was terrible in its magnitude, something too huge for comprehension.

And so I grew on. Many more of these electrons, if such they were, gathered together, but my luck held and I passed beyond this new body thus formed —a molecule? I wondered. Suddenly I tired of the endless procession of stars coming together, forming ever into new stars that came together too. I was getting homesick. I wanted to see human faces about me again, to be rid of this fantastic nightmare. It was unreal. It was impossible. It must stop.

A sudden impulse of fear took hold upon me. This should not go on forever. I had to see my earth again. All at once, I reached down, and pressed the central button to stop.

But just as a swiftly moving vehicle may not stop at once, so could not I. The terrific momentum of my growth carried me on, and the

machine moved still, though slower. The stars seemed shooting upon me, closing about me. I could see no end of them before me. I must stop or they would be about me.

Closer in they came, but smaller and smaller. They became a thousand pinpoints shooting about me. They merged into a thick, tenuous cloud about me, thicker and thicker. I was shooting up now, but my growth had stopped. The cloud became a cold, clammy thing that yielded to the touch, and—and it was water! Yes, pure water! And I was floating in it... .

Years

Suddenly I shot up, out of the water, and fell back. Strength returned to me, and warmth, and love of life. It was water, something I knew, something familiar, a friend. And so I swam, swam on and on, until my feet touched bottom, and I was leaping forth out of the water, on to the sand... .

Chapter 4

There is no need to drag the tale out. I awoke finally from an exhausted sleep, and found myself in a world that was strange, yet familiar. It might have been a lonely part of the earth, except for an atmosphere of strangeness that told me subconsciously it was another world. There was a sun, but it was far distant, no larger than my moon. And vast clouds of steam hung over the jungles beyond the sand, obscuring them in a shimmering fog, obscuring the sun so that it danced and glimmered hazily through the curtain. And a perpetual twilight thus reigned.

I tried to tell myself I was in some strange manner home. But I knew I was not. At last, breaking beneath the weight of homesickness and regret, I surrendered to a fit of weeping that shamed my manhood even as I wept. Then a mood of terrible, unreasoning anger against Fate enveloped me, and I stormed here and there about the beach.

And so, all through the night, I alternately wept and raged, and when the dawn came I sank again in peaceful slumber... .

When I awoke, I was calm. Obviously, in stopping I told myself I had been left in a cloud of atoms that proved to be part of another group of matter, another earth or atom, as you will. The particular atoms I was in were part of the ocean.

The only thing to do was to return. I was ashamed of my madness now, for I had the means of return. In the third button ... the bottom button. I saw no reason for delay. I splashed back into the water, and swam hastily out to the point where it seemed I had risen. I pushed the lowest button. Slowly I felt myself grow smaller and smaller, the sense of suffocation returned, only to pass away as the pinpoints shot about me again, but away this time. The whole nightmare was repeated now, reversed, for everything seemed to be opening up

before me. I thrilled with joy as I thought of my return to my home, and the Professor again. All the world was friend to me now, in my thoughts, a friend I could not bear to lose.

And then all my hopes were dashed. How, I thought, could I strike my own earth again? For even if I had come to the right spot in the water to a certainty, how could I be sure I would pass between just the right cloud of molecules? And what would lead me to the very electron I had left? And, after the nucleus, why should I not enter the wrong nebula? And even if I should hit the right nebula, how should I find my own star, my own earth? It was hopeless, impossible! ... And yet, so constituted is human nature that I could hope nevertheless!

My God! Impossible as it is, I did it! I am certain that it was my own nebula I entered, and I was in the center, where the sun should be. It sounds fantastic, it is fantastic. The luck of a lifetime, an infinity, for me. Or so it should have been. But I looked where the sun ought to be found, in the central cluster. I halted early and watched long with a sinking heart. But the sun—was gone!

I lay motionless in the depths of space and I watched idly the stars that roamed here and there. Black despair was in my heart, but it was a despair so terrible that I could not comprehend its awfulness. It was beyond human emotion. And I was dazed, perhaps even a little mad.

The stars were tiny pinpoints of light, and they shot back and forth and all around like purposeless nothings. And ever would they collide, and a greater pinpoint would be born, or a thousand pieces of fragments would result. Or the two might start off on new tracks, only to collide again. Seconds it took them to cover what I knew to be billions of trillions of light-years.

And gradually the truth dawned upon me, the awful truth. These stars were suns, even as mine had been, and they grew and died and were reborn, it seemed now, in a second, all in a second. Yet fair races bloomed and died, and worlds lived and died, races of intelligent beings strove, only to die. All in a second. But it was not a second to them. My immense size was to blame on my part.

For time is relative, and depends upon size. The smaller a creature, the shorter its life. And yet, to itself, the fly that lives but a day has passed a lifetime of years. So it was here. Because I had

grown large, centuries had become but moments to me. And the faster, the larger I grew, the swifter the years, the millions of years had rolled away. I remembered how I had seen the streaks that meant the planets going about the sun. So fast had they revolved that I could not see the circuit that meant but a second to me. And yet each incredibly swift revolution had been a year! A year on earth, a second to me! And so, on an immensely greater scale, had it been as I grew. The few minutes that meant to me the sun's movement through the ether of what seemed a yard had been centuries to the earth. Before I had lived ten minutes of my strange existence, Professor Martyn had vainly hoped away a lifetime, and died in bitter despair. Men had come and died, races had flourished and fallen. Perhaps all mankind had died away from a world stripped of air and water. In ten minutes of my life...

And so I sit here now, pining hopelessly for my Mother Earth. This strange planet of a strange star is all beyond my ken. The men are strange and their customs, curious. Their language is beyond my every effort to comprehend, yet mine they know like a book. I find myself a savage, a creature to be treated with pity and contempt in a world too advanced even for his comprehension. Nothing here means anything to me.

I live here on sufferance, as an ignorant African might have lived in an incomprehensible, to him, London. A strange creature, to play with and to be played with by children. A clown ... a savage ... ! And yearn as I will for my earth, I know I may never know it again, for it was gone, forgotten, non-existent a trillion centuries ago... !

Part 2
THE RETURN

NEVER hoped—never dreamed, when I wrote the tale you have read, that I should ever see the earth again. Who in the universe could have hoped against all the knowledge of insuperable fate which had come to me? Who could hope to overcome Time and Space, to recapture that which was gone forever? Yet it is just this that I have done—or something very like it. And it is a story a thousand times more fantastic, more impossible, than the story of my journey. And like that, it is true.

When I last wrote, I was living in a state of awful quiescence upon a planet of the star Delni—I do not know yet what it would be called here, or whether it is even existent now for us. Perhaps I exaggerated a little my position, but that was before I had met Vinda. Vinda—shall I ever see her again? I leave to-morrow—but will she be there?

I saw little enough of that world, and what little I did see I shall not attempt to describe here, for it will all go into the report I am drawing up, with Martyn's aid, for a scientific magazine. But when I pressed the bottom button again, and the stars began to grow large, the planets to become visible as they circled in their paths, I had no desire except to sleep. With a reckless abandon that gave no thought for the consequences, I came close to one of the planets and waited for it to grow larger. How can I describe the mad humor of my situation, lying there in space with a world, a living world, revolving a few inches from my chest? I could look down over it as you would down over a model or globe of the world. I felt a wild desire to put my finger into its great seas, and I could imagine to myself the consternation they would feel—if there were inhabitants—when the awful tempest and the tidal waves came to them. It was just such a desire as we feel sometimes in church, to shout a heresy or to throw something at the priest, not because we are heretics or because we dislike the priest, but for some inexplicable reason—an impulse. Fortunately, I did not surrender to that impulse. But I laughed a great hysterical laugh, and it must have been like the laughter of a god reverberating through the universe, dying thinly away in unimaginable reaches of the distance.

All this time the planet was growing bigger. It was not long before I was able, with the most fascinating acrobatic antics, to propel myself

far enough away to place my feet almost upon it. Still it grew—or should I drop this playing with appearances, and say that I shrank? In any case, its heavily veiled face with clouds became vaster and more vast, until it must have been about my own height in diameter. Then I let my feet push through the clouds until they were resting lightly upon the surface, A few minutes later I began to feel for the first time since my departure that my own size was returning to me, the size that God intended I should have. It was then that I turned Martyn's "gravity" switch, rather undecided what would happen, and caring very little, I suppose. Nothing did happen.

The clouds came closer and closer toward my face, mounting up over my body and growing each moment more billowy and more illimitable. In a little while they had enveloped my face, and a few minutes later they were above me.

It is now, I know, the moment when a writer of romances would introduce some great horrible bird that fought him in the air, or two armies of rival air-men who fought about him. Unfortunately or fortunately, as you will, nothing of that sort happened to me; and, if it had, I think I should have been too sleepy to be interested. Instead, I looked down upon long, rolling plains of golden grain. There were no forests, or even trees, that I could see. The ocean came to within a few inches of my feet, and far away across it, I caught a bright tiny glitter that might have been a city. There seemed to be no mountains, only a few low hills. The sunlight very seldom penetrated through the clouds in all its opulent splendor, but the world was no less bright for that, since its sun was very huge. There seemed to be a clear, diffused, bluish sort of light over the face of the planet.

I need not detail all my thoughts and emotions as I grew smaller, coming closer and closer to the ground. They were confused, meaningless feelings, and I have no memory of them except as a mood half way between a dull sorrow for the loss of my true earth and a dull wonder at the exotic beauty of this earth I had come upon. In a little while, however, I had shut off the machine and was decreasing more gently in size. Once I turned it on again for a moment, finding that I had miscalculated, but I quickly turned it off. During what seemed to me hours, I shrank little by little, with increasing slowness, until I stood only a little taller than the grain of

the long fields. There was nothing about me by which I could gauge my desired height, so I decided to let myself remain as I was until I had slept. Without any thought for possible differences in the atmospheres of this world and that of my own to which I had become accustomed, I feverishly pulled off my globular helmet and my suit. I was greeted with a great breath of cool air from the sea, and I stood for many minutes bathing in its fresh purity. Then, with a sigh, I sank down into the soft grain, and, watching the tall stalks rippling above me in the wind, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, it was dark. There were no stars to be seen and no moon, but there was a faint radiance, a phosphorescence, upon the grain in which I lay. I did not rise for a long while, for I was thinking hopelessly of the futility of my life with my world gone, of the new life I should have to build up here, learning everything all over again as though I were a baby. After a while, knowing the madness such thoughts as these might lead me to, I tried to dismiss them, and I stood up. I was amazed at first to discover the grain about a foot above my head now, for it had been at least two feet below my head when I had gone to sleep. Surely it had not grown a yard during the night? I soon realized, however, that it was I who had grown a little smaller, as the machine continued to move with increasing slowness. I now removed the tiny instrument, which I had kept on after taking off the suit, lest it should come to harm.

I was puzzled to know how I might reach civilization, if there was civilization. But, remembering the sea, I set off in the direction I thought it lay, carrying the suit and the machine, both extraordinarily light. I walked for a large part of the night. I did not realize just how far the ocean might be, since I remembered it as no more than a few inches from my huge foot. I was fairly certain after walking many miles that I must have taken the wrong direction. But no. A little while before the dawn I heard the faint sound of its breakers, and I soon was able to see it from the top of a hill.

When I reached the beach, I once more perceived the light of the city, assuming that it was a city, across the water. Of course, I could not see the flashing structures themselves, but an intense golden radiance spread itself over the sky, as though it might really have been the moon rising.

I walked along the beach until dawn, and then I went on for a large part of the morning, trying to reach a point upon the shore that would be directly opposite the City. I should imagine it was a few hours before noon when the flying machines appeared. They came out of the east, from the direction of the City, flying very low. They flew together, several hundred of them I should imagine, until they reached a point on the shore probably ten miles below me. Then they seemed to disperse, some into the country, a few at intervals along the beach. It was not long before one of them came shooting up toward me at a speed enormous beyond my imagination. I began to wave my arms wildly, and apparently I was seen, for the plane immediately decreased its speed.

A few minutes later, after passing perhaps a mile beyond me, the plane turned and glided along the beach until it stopped a hundred yards or so away. It was a small machine of a most curious and delicate design, but it did not differ very radically from those I had seen on the earth.

A man leaped out and came toward me. He, too, was very like myself, but about a foot taller, and with an extremely high forehead. His features were delicate, his build very slight but quite graceful. He was unclothed, except for a belt of metal and several metal ornaments upon his arms and legs. He carried a small, straight instrument of metal in his hand, apparently a weapon, which was turned upon me. I raised my arms, and cried "Wait!" or something equally absurd, which, naturally, he could not understand. He did not trouble to reply, realizing, I suppose, that our languages were different. Instead, he motioned me to approach, and, backing away from me, he allowed me to come up to the plane. I was signalled to enter it. There was no cock-pit, no enclosure. It consisted only of a platform, some five feet wide and ten feet long, with a rail of thin metal about it. A small metal chair of severe design was affixed to the forward end, behind the controls.

I mounted the platform and sat down, at his command, in one corner. Still holding the tiny instrument toward my chest, he then secured one of my wrists and one ankle to a couple of metal cuffs, evidently for that purpose, upon the rail. He flung the suit, after a contemptuous examination, into the corner beside him. I grinned at

him several times during these operations, in order to show that my intentions were of the best. But he only stared at me with an expressionless face and turned away to the controls. If any shadow of expression was in his eyes, I fancied it was disgust.

A moment later he rose swiftly from the beach and turned toward the City, leaving me to my own despondent reveries as we flew over the water with amazing swiftness. He must have given some signal to the other planes by wireless, for a short while later I saw them all falling in behind, far back. It was then that I suspected, for the first time, that they might all have been searching for me. I had forgotten how conspicuous my giant body would have looked to them, even from a distance, if anyone chanced to observe it.

At the risk of omitting details which the reader would find very interesting, I am going to say nothing of the City as yet. I saw too little of it to draw any accurate conclusions, and I have very little more than a vague impression of tall buildings, flashing in the sunlight, mile after mile, extending far out over the horizon; buildings of immense height, standing each many hundreds of yards apart, with parks between. It was all roofed over and kept apparently at a uniform heat, while I suspect that in some way the clouds above were artificially dispelled to permit the huge sun to be seen. We entered through great gates in the glass dome, and joined a throng of other planes, mostly very small ones, and in a few minutes we had landed on the roof of a building near the limits of the City.

A number of the tall men then gathered about us. They were all clean shaven and they were practically without hair. They had an air of age and wisdom, although their faces, like that of the flyer, were smooth, delicate, and impassive. I was released, still under the scrutiny of the little weapon, and conveyed down, through elevators and moving passages, to a cell of white metal containing a low bed, some small chairs, a table, and other mere necessities. Food was put before me, and then I was left alone. I never left that cell thereafter until the moment of my final departure from the planet.

The days I spent in there were a long and monotonous succession of lonely hours and tedious examinations. On the day that I arrived, after I had eaten my meal, two of the men to whose care I was committed came with a guard to inspect me. They said nothing

during the whole time they were there. I was motioned to explain myself. Half incredulously, I began to talk, and they nodded as though they understood—I cannot say how; I never learned in what fashion they interpreted my speech. I told of my journey and of its consequences. I told about my world. At intervals they nodded, I suppose to assure me that they were listening. After awhile I was given writing materials. I wrote an appeal to them to explain their world to me, so that I might take up the frayed ends of my life upon it. But always they only nodded at me, and at last they departed, taking with them the words I had written. A little while later, several guards were sent to my ceii. They handled me as though I were an animal, washing me with a peculiar sort of water, cutting my hair, shaving my beard. When I was apparently clean enough for their sensibilities, I was left alone again.

This went on for days and days. Sometimes the same two men who had first interviewed me came again. Sometimes there were other visitors. Every day I was forced to submit to the attendance of the guards, like any caged beast. I was never spoken to. All day long, when I was alone, I would wander restlessly about, thinking over and over again the old, terrible thoughts of what I had seen and lost and would not know. I should have gone mad, I think, had they not acceded finally to my request for writing materials—the only sign they ever gave me that I was understood. I might have given way to some murderous fit of rage against them, had those guards not always been there, with their tiny, threatening weapons.

But I was at least a little consoled with the writing materials. Thereafter I was able to spend hours and hours setting down the details of my adventure, recording all my thoughts and desires. I have given here only a small portion of all that I wrote. I think it must have been this relief in writing that kept me sane. I had never before realized so fully the vast wonder of the alphabet, of this thing we call writing. By pouring out all my heart into words, by expressing the things that hung so oppressively over my heart, I was able to make them a little lighter, and, perhaps, a little heroic, a little flattering and epic.

But this, thank God, did not go on forever. For one day Vinda came. She said afterward that it had been only curiosity which led

her to my cell. Everybody in the City, everybody in that world, seems to have been wildly curious to see the strange creature from the distant star. But Vinda was the daughter of the King of the planet, whose family, so far as I could gather, retained its supremacy only so long as it retained its great intellectual power. Vinda's father, the King, was a physicist.

Vinda came in state, with a guard of six men and an escort of six scientists. I will not say that I loved her at first sight. I was, indeed, amazed by her great beauty and the mobility of her features, so fine a contrast with the impassivity of the men. She was not very tall either, just about my own height, and the most graceful woman I have ever known. She smiled at me with a somewhat aloof interest, and then—then she spoke! The first sounds of human speech I had heard on the planet. And she spoke English! Only a few broken words, it is true. But I found afterward that she had learned them, just for the amusement of it, from the reports of the scientists who examined me. She said:

"You—are—Kirby?" Her accent—how could I reproduce the sweetness of that clear accent, so exotic, so perfectly in keeping with the delicacy of her own appearance? For a long time I could say nothing, just stare at her open-mouthed, amazed, delighted. Then I managed to stutter some foolish reply:

"Kirby? Yes... . yes, I am Kirby. Yes... " And she smiled again, and I smiled, unaware of the scornful gleam in the eyes of the men. She smiled even more brightly when she saw my own grin. Indeed, I fancy she was about to laugh, laugh at me, but perhaps my very simplicity made her calm again. For—do you see?—I did not learn for a long time that only women laughed and played, and amused themselves with artistic pursuits on that planet. They did, indeed, scorn me, those men, when they saw me laughing, as we would scorn a man who talked with a piping voice and giggled and stepped mincingly about. But I like to think that there was something in me more appealing to Vinda than the impassive manhood of those scientists. Perhaps, after all, it is only that I was unique. But she did like me—I am certain of it now.

We said very little that time. She was reserved, formal, I was too confused to speak coherently. After a while she retired, and it

seemed to me that my cell was ten thousand times as bare and cold and hard as it had been before.

The next time she came alone, except for a single guard. She had appealed to her father, the King, telling him how harmless I was and how different from the men of that planet, and that I should not be judged by their standards. She had persuaded him, so she came alone, with writing materials and a small machine which recorded sound and vision, and which took the place of books. She had decided to learn my language, knowing that hers was incomprehensible to me, since it depended on a sense which is dormant or inexistent in us, something related, perhaps, to the vague thing we call mental telepathy.

Oh, but I spent endless days of wonder and enchantment there with Vinda! Never once was I permitted to leave my cell, but I was content now, for it seemed that she brought all the beauty of the universe in with her, the sunshine, the gold and the green of the fields, the blue of the sea—everything. God knows how I ever failed to realize why those days were so beautiful, but I did not. Not until I was gone, and it was too late.

It was not long before we could converse together, for she had what seemed to me a marvellous mind, although, apparently, the minds of women were not very highly esteemed in that world. She told me, quite simply, that women had never evolved there beyond a certain state of civilization, while men had gone on thousands of years ahead. Women, it seemed, were kept for the sort of intellectual labour which corresponds to the manual labour of the savage women. The men were creators and teachers. They discovered, invented, reproduced, perfected endless marvellous things. Women, on the other hand, understood them only in the detailed way of those who tend them, watch over them, care for them.

But I had to confess to her that my own intellect probably was not so advanced as hers. And it is this, it seems, that made our companionship so delightful. Women to those scientists were merely a biological fact. Except in rare cases, there was no companionship. With us it was different, for mentally we were nearly equal, and that seemed to revive in her an instinct long dead on that planet—the instinct that I now dare to say was love. Not biology, but love.

So we were daily together for a long time. Each moment of our conversation was wonderful to us both, for it revealed to each of us the exotic life of a planet unknown to us. I remember very little of what she told me about that planet—it seems that I can remember nothing but Vinda herself, her low voice with its delicious accent, her eyes, her hair— everything that a lover always remembers.

But I had not forgotten my longing for the earth. At first I was able to lose myself in the wonderful things she told me of her planet. But later, when I talked of my own world, I became homesick and hopeless. She seemed to grow more thoughtful as I spoke, but at the time I did not think it was more than an endeavour to form mental pictures of the things I related. One day, however, when we had talked for a long time of the earth, a silence followed which lasted for many minutes. At last she said:

"If you were able, you would return to your earth?" I raised my arms despairingly.

"God, yes!" I cried, "but the desire is all I have. No man can conquer time." She was very thoughtful for a moment.

"It has been done," she replied after a while.

"But Vinda, one cannot re-capture what is gone and past!"

"No," she agreed, "but one can do almost that. I do not know—but my uncle has a secret—"

"A secret! What, Vinda! Tell me what!"

"I must tell you first of a theory... ." She pondered while I waited breathlessly, even forgetting her beauty as I watched her face for some sign of the thing she was about to tell me.

"You have spoken," she said, "of a man called Einstein on your earth, and of other men who believe that time is a fourth dimension and that it is curved. Some of them, you say, believe that space is so curved that, if one goes sufficiently far, he will return to the point from which he started. Years ago we made discoveries on this planet about the curvature of time. And our evidence has taught us that time goes in circles, in cycles. They say that, if one were to live forever, he, would find eventually the whole of history repeating itself."

"You mean—?"

"That a time comes when your world or this world, after having lived and died, will live again and again die."

"With the same history, the same civilizations?"

"Yes. For they teach us that there is a destiny in the life of all things, that the growth of the universe follows definite courses in which every fact, every incident, is inseparably woven into a texture which embraces the whole, and that every action of man or nature (and man is part of nature) is inevitable because it grows out of natural forces. The secret of all this we women have never learned; it is the study of the scientists. But the whole history of the universe is rigidly fore-ordained, and so, when time returns to its starting point, the course of history remains the same. That is the best I can do for an explanation."

"Vinda! You mean that some day there will be an earth like mine again?"

"Yes, Kirby." She always called me Kirby.

"And the same people! Martyn, and the rest?"

"That is what they say." I leaped up, and began to walk wildly about. To return! To see Martyn again, and the rest! And then a thought came to me. I grinned bitterly.

"But that will be millions of years away," I said, "and I shall be dead." She looked at me for a long while, and then she answered:

"No, Kirby. You passed millions of years in a few instants during your great journey. Do you not see that you can grow large again and that the millions of years will flash by as swiftly?"

"By Jove—yes!" I shouted.

"But you would be leaving us very soon?" she said.

"If that is true!" I cried. "Why, I would leave tomorrow!"

She turned away, and in a moment answered, "Not to-morrow, perhaps, but in a few weeks." And, suddenly, she went away.

I did not sleep that night with the wonder of this truly unbelievable thing. All night, all the next morning, I paced excitedly about my room, waiting for her return. When she did arrive, I begged her for more details.

"What can I tell you," she said, "who know so little myself? I have spoken with my uncle. He could not tell me much that I understood. There is some great secret underlying it, some great explanation,

which is always just a few steps beyond my grasp. I seem to see for an instant what it is—then suddenly it is gone. He said, for instance, that over and above the cycles of time, is a great general progression which makes the civilizations of the universe always just a little further advanced in each successive cycle before they decline again. He described that as a sort of fifth dimension in time, comparable he said, to the path of the sun which carries the planets always just a little farther in space, although each year they return to their starting point in reference to the sun. It is immensely confusing."

"In other words, if I returned to the earth, I should find it a little further advanced than when I left it?"

"Somewhat like that. Except that, if you returned to your year 1937, you would find yourself in an era comparable to the year 1967, let us say, on the earth of the cycle you had left. In order to find your friend, Martyn, it would be necessary to go back to an earlier year which we cannot know, which you would, therefore, have to estimate yourself."

"But," I said, "there are things it is difficult to understand. Is it true, for instance, that there will be another incarnation of my body which will leave the earth at the same time I am returning?"

"It would seem so. And that incarnation would return in the cycle following your return."

"How complicated it all is!"

"That is only because we are not able to understand it as the scientists do. They speak, for instance, of the dimension of size. It seems that there is a direction, which we cannot quite grasp mentally any more than we can grasp time as a direction, which extends from the small to the great. That is to say, when you grow you are really moving in a new dimension which is linked, how I do not comprehend, with the dimension of time. The difference between this universe and the universe of which it is a part, an atom, is a difference in space through another dimension—similar to the difference in miles or light-years between our sun and another sun of our universe."

"But really, that is too obscure for me."

"For me, too," she acknowledged. "But our scientists understand." We were silent for a long while, she dreaming some private dream of her own, I pondering these vast conceptions that were beyond my grasp. I broke the silence first:

"In all theories of time as a dimension, this point has always raised itself in my mind. If I were to return during some crisis in history and foretell the mistake that would be made, could that mistake be rectified, changing the whole course of history?"

"That," she answered, "would come under the head of the progress which civilization makes from cycle to cycle, I think. You must remember that all these things are inevitable. If it were your destiny to return at some earlier point in your world's history, it would be the result of natural laws, and any changes you might effect in history would also be inevitable." Again we were silent.

At last I roused myself from my reveries.

"All this," I said, "seems very dim and unreal to me yet. I suppose that is natural. But we must begin to act. Could your scientists help me in the problem of finding the point in history where my world will be again as I left it?" She looked at me very steadily for a moment.

"You are sure you wish to go?" she said. I smiled.

"I cannot imagine wishing not to," I said... . Oh, fool that I was! If I had only known how much I should some day wish to return to her...

"Then," she answered, averting her eyes, "I think I can help you. You kept records of the time you spent in your journey?"

"As well as I could," I replied.

"Can you draw a diagram of the stars as they looked from your earth when you left?"

"I am sure of it," I assured her.

"Then I think it can be done."

And, for the rest of that day I sat with her, drawing my maps of the sky from memory, setting down extracts from my tale of the journey. When she left, she had all the information which she thought would be required.

Again I shall pass over the next few weeks with a few words. During that time she came each day with news of the progress of her efforts. Once or twice she required new information of me. She had

persuaded her uncle to make the calculations for me in his moments of relaxation (what an awful thought that conjured in my mind of the intellectual labour of these men!) Apparently the man, by figuring the length of time I had been away and the position of my sun in space, could identify it among the amazing records he possessed of all the stars in our universe, past, present, or future—things inconceivable to me. Having identified my world, he could then figure just the size I should have to become and the time I should have to spend in my various sizes, before I could return again to the world in its next cycle, unimaginable millions of eons in the future.

When the day came on which all these calculations were finished, Vinda brought me my suit, which had been preserved, and the machine. She brought also a chronometer which, she said, would record, upon its numerous dials, the passage of time in the universe I was leaving, regardless of the various sizes I might assume. It had been connected by those marvellous men in some fashion to the machine itself, so that the growth of the machine acted upon the chronometer in such fashion that it would record a corresponding swiftness in the passage of time. One dial recorded years. When the needle reached a certain swiftness of revolution on the dial, it ceased, and the next highest dial, in thousands of years, continued the record alone, having followed the dial of the years so long as it revolved. In turn this dial ceased to record, while the millions of years were registered, and so on—the whole process being reversed as my size decreased, each dial taking upon the record at the correct point.

The precise point when I must stop was recorded on the various dials, and the precise point when I must stop my growth and shrink again was indicated on the highest dial. It was impossible that I could fail, if I followed my directions explicitly.

When all was ready, an escort of two guards was given me, and Vinda came with me, very impassive, very silent. We went from my cell up through the building to the roof, and entered the plane which awaited us. This time I would not be chained to the rail, but I would stand beside it with Vinda.

We passed out through the City precisely as we had come in, reached the sea, and headed across it toward the isolated spot

where I had first appeared. Vinda and I stood alone in the stern of the platform, looking out over the retreating water and the City.

"Do you not think," she said, "that you will be disappointed when you return? Will you not find it very ironic to take up a hum-drum life after all these exotic adventures?"

"No doubt I shall," I answered, for, now that I was on my way back, I could admit many things "but there will be the compensations of friendship and other things. And, anyhow, it is my destiny." She sighed.

"Yes... it is your destiny. Is there, perhaps, someone whom you love and who calls you back to her?" I laughed lightly.

"By no means!" I said. "I am immune. I have never fallen in love." For one lies, many times, without knowing it.

"You are very unfortunate," she said, "or perhaps very fortunate; it is hard to say."

"Are you, then, in love?" I asked her. She looked out over the sea, her face turned away.

"Yes," she replied simply.

"Then I wish you the greatest success," I said formally. And—do you know?—I was suddenly a little piqued, without at all knowing why. It may be that men are more intellectual than women, but it is certain that they are sometimes more terrible fools.

So we went rushing on through the air, cool, fragrant, quiet. How can I ever have wished to leave that world? Perhaps, if I had spent all those weeks in the open air and with Vinda, perhaps— but there is no perhaps. I can only know facts. And it is a fact that I left her, and that I loved her—love her yet.

We came to the fields upon which I had landed. There I put on my suit with feverish haste, as though afraid lest it melt away under my hands. I adjusted the machine and the chronometer upon it with Vinda's aid, and then, isolated in a profound silence within my glass globe, I stood waiting for the hour at which I must begin my journey. It seemed to me that endless hours passed while I stood there in keen impatience, with the two curious guards watching me. At the last quarter-hour, Vinda suddenly turned and went behind the machine, where I could not see her. But I was too busily watching the face of my wrist-watch to see her in any case.

At last the moment came. I smiled a Homeric smile, and waved my hand at the two guards as I pressed the top button, while they gave me one last stolid glance and hurried to the machine. I began, with the usual dizziness, to grow, with closed eyes as the tingling electric flash shot through my veins. When, a moment later, these sensations had passed away, and I opened my eyes, I had already grown to thirty feet or so. As I looked down, I saw Vinda struggling between the two guards who evidently held her back from a dangerous proximity to my swiftly enlarging feet. I wondered what she wanted, and I felt a sudden regret that I had not been able to tell her good-bye. I was half inclined to stop my growth for a few minutes, but, instead, I knelt down far enough away from her for safety, and I smiled, waving my arm like some huge, clumsy, ridiculous giant. She stiffened and ceased her struggles. For a moment she stared at me with an expression nearer anger, I thought, than anything else. Then, suddenly, she turned and walked swiftly to the machine, followed by her guards, while I climbed unsteadily back upon my feet again—already nearly eighty feet high. A moment later the plane rose from the ground and darted away toward the sea. For a long time I followed its flight, until I had pushed up through the clouds, and lost it.

It certainly is not necessary to detail my return, for, in every respect, it was like the first journey. For a long, impatient, monotonous time, I grew larger and larger. Fortunately, it was not necessary to go beyond the limits of the nuclei, as by now I was determined to call them. There, at a certain time, I pressed the middle button and stopped, then I pushed the bottom button, and the last stage of my return was under way.

I came back to the earth without accident. It was the twenty-third day of May, in the year 1847, that I arrived. As Vinda had foretold, that year was quite correspondent with the year 1943 of the cycle during which I had left. I came down, unfortunately enough, in the Sahara desert, but not far from a settlement. I need not describe the difficulties I encountered in securing my passage back to New York. I arrived, of course, without a cent, and without even a stitch of clothing besides the suit, which I discarded at the earliest opportunity in favor of a wretched tatter of rags which left me almost as naked as

I would have been without it. Had it not been for the generosity of a certain Consul, who fed and clothed me and bought me my passage, I should no doubt be wandering around the Sahara yet, carrying on my back a machine with which one can overcome time and size and space!

On the day that I arrived in New York, I went at once to Martyn's laboratory, I was amazed to find it deserted. I was absolutely at a loss, for his name was not in the telephone directory. In desperation, I called at the office of a newspaper. You will all recall what happened to Martyn, of course, but to me it was a most horrible and disgusting mistake—imprisoned for manslaughter. They had accused him of murdering me. The poor man had realized, when I failed to return, the hideous mistake he made in forgetting that size would affect the relative length of time. He had explained this, explained the whole story, and it caused a terrible sensation. It seems that laws were enacted all over the country for the "restraint" of scientists, who were said to constitute "the greatest menace to our country since the civil war."

Needless to say, my re-appearance has created a far more terrible sensation. This time, however, it is hoped that it will take the form of a re-action in favour of the scientists. My dramatic clearing of Martyn's name from any suggestion of blame has fired the imagination—such as it is—of the people.

Of course I must remember, difficult as it is sometimes, that the Kirby who left the world of this cycle is not the Kirby who has returned. I have to think of another person, my double in appearance, life, and name, who is now wandering about the universe, watching with amazement the strange formations of the stars, crashing about that huge beach far up there in the illimitable void, or seeing with a sudden rush of despair all the terribly distinct details of his fate. Yes, I can sympathize with that brother of mine.

The world has changed in many details since I knew it in the last cycle. For instance, the America I knew was a Republic still, whereas now, you know that it is the Monarchy which was declared by Theodore Roosevelt during the Great War of 1812, and which is now ruled by the Emperor Theodore II, In spite of this and many other things, however, the world is not materially different from the world I

left. Those who are interested in the changes will do well to read the book which I am preparing, in collaboration with Martyn, who at last has come into his own, on the journey which I have recounted only generally here.

To-morrow morning I leave this earth, perhaps for the last time. You, who have read this attentively, must realize by now the love which, all unsuspectingly, I felt for Vinda. After a few months here, I soon realized the terrible mistake I had made—for I am sure that she loved me as well. During the last few years my longing for her has grown more unbearably great with every hour, and I cannot remain here any longer.

To-morrow, Martyn will accompany me for the last time to that laboratory in the country which was the beginning of all my fantastic adventures. He will say good-bye again, a final good-bye this time, and he will adjust about me the suit, the globe, and the machines. I will press the top button—the top button! And then—only a few hours until I see Vinda again.

Martyn has made the calculations. I shall appear to her no more than a few hours after the departure of that person who is following all my adventures. It will, of course, be in the next cycle of time, and there will be changes. But surely my Vinda will be there, and I shall be able to take her in my arms and tell her of all the love I have for her. I cannot believe that it will be another woman. No—just as this Martyn is the same Martyn I left, so will that Vinda be my Vinda. Surely it is the soul that counts, and the soul is the same.

There is one thing that sometimes worried my leaping mind. There is this other Kirby—this double of mine, this other me. Perhaps he will have more perception than I have had (for does not each cycle bring a finer civilization, and is not the man the basis of civilization?). Perhaps he will have the intelligence to remain with Vinda, and I shall meet him there—meet myself! How impossibly it savours of Poe and William Wilson! For if we meet, and we both love Vinda, there will be only one way to settle it—we must fight, fight to the death perhaps, for this love is very great. And, if we are the same man, will the death of one mean the death of the other too? It does not matter. At least I shall be able to say at least once to Vinda that I love her... .

(THE END)

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The cover image was adapted from the original publication of the story.

The preface was written in 2013 by Stanley M. Sokolow, the editor and contributor of this eBook to the Feedbooks public domain collection.



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Food for the mind