

# Skeleton

By RAY BRADBURY

"God Almighty, all these years I've gone around with a Skeleton inside of me!"

IT WAS past time for him to see the doctor again. Mr. Harris turned palely in at the stair-well, and on his way up the flight he saw Dr. Burleigh's name gilded over a pointing arrow. Would Dr. Burleigh sigh when he walked in? After all, this would make the tenth trip so far this year. But Burleigh shouldn't complain; after all he got money for the examinations!

The nurse looked him over and smiled, a bit amusedly, as she tiptoed to the glazed glass door and opened it to put her head in. Harris thought he heard her say, "Guess who's here, Doctor?" And didn't the doctor's acid voice reply, faintly, "Oh my God, again?" Harris swallowed uneasily.

When Harris walked in, Dr. Burleigh snorted thinly. "Aches in your bones again! Ah!" He scowled at Harris and adjusted his glasses. "My dear Harris, you've been curried with the finest tooth-combs and bacteria-brushes known to science. You're only nervous. Let's see your fingers. Too many cigarettes. Let me smell your breath. Too much whiskey. Let's see your eyes. Not enough sleep. My response? Go home to bed, stop drinking, stop smoking. Ten dollars, please."

Harris stood there, sulking.

Dr. Burleigh looked up from his papers. "You still here? You're a hypochondriac! That's *eleven* dollars, now."

"But why should my bones ache?" asked Harris.

Dr. Burleigh addressed him like a child. "You ever had a pained muscle, and keep at it, irritating it, fussing with it, rubbing it? It gets worse, the more you bother it. Then you leave it alone and the pain vanishes. You realize you caused most of the



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

soreness. Well, son, that's what's with you. Leave yourself alone. Take a dose of salts. Get out of here now! Take that business trip to Phoenix you've been stewing about for months. Do you good to get away!"

Mr. Harris riffled through a classified phone directory five minutes later, at the corner druggists. A fine lot of sympathy one got from blind fools like Burleigh!

He passed his finger down a list of BONE SPECIALISTS, found one named M. Munigant. Munigant lacked an M.D. or any other academical lettering behind his name, but his office was easily reached. Three blocks down, one block over. . . .

M. Munigant, like his office, was small and dark. Like his office, he smelled of iodoform, iodine and other odd things. He was a good listener, though, and listened with eager, shiny eyes, and when he talked to Harris, he had an accent and seemed to whistle every word, undoubtedly due to imperfect dentures. Harris told all.

M. Munigant nodded. He had seen cases like this before. The bones of the body. Man was not aware of his bones. Ah, yes, the bones. The skeleton. Most difficult. Something concerning an imbalance, an unsympathetic coordination between soul, flesh and bone. Very complicated, softly whistled M. Munigant. Harris listened, fascinated. Now, *here* was a doctor who understood his illness! Psychological, said M. Munigant. He moved swiftly, delicately to a dingy wall and rattled down half a dozen X-rays and paintings of the human skeleton. He pointed at these. Mr. Harris must become aware of his problem, yes. He pointed at this and that bone, and these and those, and some others.

The pictures were quite awful. They had something of the grotesquerie and off-bound horror of a Dali painting. Harris shivered.

M. Munigant talked on. Did Mr. Harris desire treatment of his bones?

"That all depends," said Harris.

M. Munigant could not help Harris unless Harris was in the proper mood. Psychologically, one had to NEED help, or the doctor was of no use. But (shrugging) Mr. Munigant would "try."

Harris lay on a table with his mouth open. The lights were off, the shades drawn. M. Munigant approached his patient. Something touched Harris' tongue. He felt the jawbones forced out. They cracked and made noises. One of those pictures on the dim wall seemed to leap. A violent shivering went through Harris and, involuntarily, his mouth snapped shut.

M. Munigant cried out. He had almost had his nose bitten off! It was no use.

Now was not the time. M. Munigant raised the shades. He looked dreadfully disappointed. When Mr. Harris felt he could cooperate psychologically, when Mr. Harris really *needed* help and trusted M. Munigant to help him, then maybe something could be done. M. Munigant held out his little hand. In the meantime, the fee was only two dollars. Mr. Harris must begin to think. Here was a sketch for Mr. Harris to study. It would acquaint him with his body. He must be aware of himself. He must be careful. Skeletons were strange, unwieldy things. M. Munigant's eyes glittered. Good day to Mr. Harris. Oh, and would he have a bread-stick? He proffered a jar of long hard salty breadsticks to Harris, taking one himself to chew on, and saying that chewing breadsticks kept him in—ah—practice. See you soon, Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris went home.

THE next day was Sunday, and Mr. Harris started the morning by feeling all sorts of new aches and pains in his body. He spent some time glancing at the funny papers and then looking with new interest at the little painting, anatomically perfect, of a skeleton M. Munigant had given him.

His wife, Clarisse, startled him at dinner when she cracked her exquisitely thin knuckles, one by one, until he clapped his hands to his ears and cried, "Don't do that!"

The remainder of the day he quarantined himself in his room. Clarisse was seated at bridge in the living room with three other ladies, laughing and conversing. Harris himself spent his time fingering and weighing the limbs of his body with growing curiosity. After an hour of this he suddenly stood up and called:

"Clarisse!"

She had a way of dancing into any room, her body doing all sorts of soft, agreeable things to keep her feet from ever quite touching the nap of a rug. She excused herself from her friends and came to see him now, brightly. She found him reseated in a far corner and she saw that he was staring at that anatomical sketch. "Are you still brooding, darling?" she asked. "Please don't." She sat upon his knees.

Her beauty could not distract him now.

in his absorption. He juggled her lightness, he touched her knee-cap, suspiciously. It seemed to move under her pale, glowing skin. "Is it supposed to do that?" he asked, sucking in his breath.

"Is what supposed to do what?" she laughed. "You mean my knee-cap?"

"Is it supposed to run around on top of your knee that way?"

She experimented. "So it *does*," she marveled. "Well, now, so it does. Icky." She pondered. "No. On the other hand—it doesn't. It's only an optical illusion. The skin moves over the bone; not vice-versa. See?" She demonstrated.

"I'm glad yours slithers too," he sighed. "I was beginning to worry."

"About what?"

He patted his ribs. "My ribs don't go all the way down, they stop *here*. And I found some confounded ones that dangle in mid-air!"

Beneath the curve of her small breasts, Clarisse clasped her hands. "Of course, silly, everybody's ribs stop at a given point. And those funny little short ones are floating ribs."

"I just hope they don't float around too much," he said, making an uneasy joke. Now, he desired that his wife leave him, he had some important discovering to do with his own body and he didn't want her laughing at him and poking fun.

"I'll feel all right," he said. "Thanks for coming in, dear."

"Any time," she said, kissing him, rubbing her small pink nose warm against his.

"I'll be damned!" He touched his nose with his fingers; then hers. "Did you ever realize that the nose bone only comes down so far and a lot of gristly tissue takes up from there on?"

She wrinkled hers. "So what?" And, dancing, she exited.

He felt the sweat rise from the pools and hollows of his face, forming a salten tide to flow down his cheeks. Next on the agenda was his spinal cord and column. He examined it in the same manner as he operated the numerous push-buttons in his office, pushing them to summon the messenger boys. But, in these pushings of his spinal column, fears and terrors answered, rushed from a million doors in Mr. Harris'

mind to confront and shake him. His spine felt awfully—bony. Like a fish, freshly eaten and skeletonized, on a china platter. He fingered the little rounded knobblins. "My God."

His teeth began to chatter. "God Almighty," he thought, "why haven't I realized it all these years. All these years I've gone around the world with a—SKELETON—inside me!" He saw his fingers blur before him, like motion films triply speeded in their quaking apprehension. "How is it that we take ourselves so much for granted. How is it we never question our bodies and our being?"

A skeleton. One of those jointed, snowy, hard things, one of those foul, dry, brittle, goudge-eyed, skull-faced, shake-fingered, rattling things that sway from neck-chains in abandoned webbed closets, one of those things found on the desert all long and scattered like dice!

HE STOOD upright, because he could not bear to remain seated. Inside me now, he grasped his stomach, his head, inside my head is a—skull. One of those curved carapaces which holds my brain like an electrical jelly, one of those cracked shells with the holes in front like two holes shot through it by a double-barreled shotgun! With its grottoes and caverns of bone, its rivetments and placements for my flesh, my smelling, my seeing, my hearing, my thinking! A skull, encompassing my brain, allowing it exit through its brittle windows to see the outside world!

He wanted to dash into the bridge party, upset it, a fox in a chickenyard, the cards fluttering all around like chicken feathers burst upward in clouds! He stopped himself only with a violent, trembling effort. Now, now, man, control yourself. This is a revelation, take it for what it is worth, understand it, savor it. BUT A SKELETON! screamed his subconscious. I won't stand for it. It's vulgar, it's terrible, its frightening. Skeletons are horrors, they clink and tinkle and rattle in old castles, hung from oaken beams, making long, indolently rustling pendulums on the wind. . . .

"Darling, will you come in and meet the ladies?" called his wife's sweet, clear voice.

Mr. Harris stood upright. His SKELE-

TON was holding him upright. This thing inside him, this invader, this horror, was supporting his arms, legs and head. It was like feeling someone just behind you who shouldn't be there. With every step he took he realized how dependent he was upon this other Thing.

"Darling, I'll be with you in a moment," he called weakly. To himself he said, "Come on, now, brace up. You've got to go back to work tomorrow. And Friday you've got to make that trip to Phoenix. Quite a drive. Over six hundred miles. Got to be in shape for that trip or you won't get Mr. Creldon to put his money into your ceramics business. Chin up, now."

Five minutes later he stood among the ladies being introduced to Mrs. Withers, Mrs. Abblematt and Miss Kirthy, all of whom had skeletons inside them but took it very calmly, because nature had carefully clothed the bare nudity of clavicle, tibia and femur with breasts, thighs, calves, with coiffure and eyebrow satanic, with bee-stung lips and—LORD! shouted Mr. Harris inwardly—when they talk or eat part of their skeleton shows—their *teeth!* I never thought of that.

"Excuse me," he said, and ran from the room only in time to drop his lunch among the petunias over the garden balustrade.

THAT night, seated on the bed as his wife undressed, he pared his toenails and fingernails scrupulously. These parts, too, were where his skeleton was shoving, indignantly growing out. He must have muttered something concerning this theory, because next thing he knew his wife, in negligee, slithered on the bed in animal cuddlesomeness, yawning, "Oh, my darling, fingernails are *not* bone, they're only hardened skin growths."

He threw the scissors away with relief. "Glad to hear that. Feel better." He looked at the ripe curves of her body, marveling. "I hope all people are made the same way."

"If you aren't the darndest hypochondriac I ever saw," she said. She snuggled to him. "Come on, what's wrong, tell mama."

"Something inside me," he said. "Something I ate."

The next morning and all afternoon at the office downtown, Mr. Harris found

that the sizes, shapes and construction of various bones in his body displeased him. At ten a.m. he asked to feel Mr. Smith's elbow one moment. Mr. Smith obliged but gave forth a suspicious scowl. And after lunch Mr. Harris asked to touch Miss Laurel's shoulderblade and she immediately pushed herself back against him, shutting her eyes in the mistaken belief that he wished to examine a few other anatomical delicacies. "Miss Laurel!" he snapped. "Stop that!"

Alone, he pondered his neuroses. The war, the pressure of his work, the uncertainty of the future, probably had much to do with his mental outlook. He wanted to leave the office, get into his own business, for himself. He had more than a little talent at artistic things, had dabbled in ceramics and pottery. As soon as possible, he'd go to Phoenix, Arizona and borrow that money from Mr. Creldon. It would build him his kiln and set up his own shop. It was a worry. What a hypochondriac he was. But it was a good thing he had contacted M. Munigant, who had seemed to understand and be eager to help him. He would fight it out with himself. He wouldn't go back to either Munigant or Dr. Burleigh unless he was forced to. The alien feeling would pass. He sat staring into nothing.

THE alien feeling did not pass. It grew. On Tuesday and Wednesday it bothered him terrifically that his outer dermis, epidermis, hair and other appendages were of a high disorder, while the integumented skeleton of himself was a slick, clean structure of efficient organization. Sometimes, in certain lights while his lips were drawn morosely downward, weighted with melancholy, he imagined he saw his skull grinning at him. *It had its nerve, it did!*

"Let go of me!" he cried. "Let go of me! You've caught me, you've captured me! My lungs, you've got them in a vise! Release them!"

He experienced violent gasps as if his ribs were pressing in, chocking the breath from him.

"My brain, stop squeezing it!"

And terrible hot headaches caught his brain like a bivalve in the compressed clamp of skull-bones.

"My vitals! All my organs, let them be,

for God's sake! Stay away from my heart!" His heart seemed to cringe from the fanning nearness of his ribs, like pale spiders crouched and fiddling with their prey.

Drenched with sweat he lay upon the bed one night while Clarrise was out attending a Red Cross meet. He tried to gather his wits again, and always the conflict of his disorderly exterior and this cool calciumed thing inside him with all its exact symmetry continued.

His complexion, wasn't it oily and lined with worry?

*Observe the flawless snow-white perfection of the skull.*

His nose, wasn't it too large?

*Then observe the small tiny bones of the skull's nose before that monstrous nasal cartilage begins forming Harris' lopsided proboscis.*

His body, wasn't it a bit plump?

*Well, then, consider the skeleton; so slender, so svelte, so economical of line and contour. Like exquisitely carved oriental ivory it is, perfected and thin as a reed.*

His eyes, weren't they protuberant and ordinary and numb looking?

*Be so kind as to note the eye-sockets of the skeleton's skull; so deep and rounded, sombre, quiet, dark pools, all knowing, eternal. Gaze deeply into skull sockets and you never touch the bottom of their dark understanding with any plumb line. All irony, all sadism, all life, all everything is there in the cupped darkness.*

Compare. Compare. Compare.

He raged for hours, glib and explosive. And the skeleton, ever the frail and solemn philosopher, quietly hung inside of Harris, saying not a word, quietly suspended like a delicate insect within a chrysalis, waiting and waiting.

**T**HEN it came to Harris.

"Wait a minute. Hold on a minute," he exclaimed. "You're helpless, too. I've got you, too! I can make you do anything I want you to, and you can't prevent it! I say put up your carpels, metacarpels and phalanges and—swift!—up they go, as I wave to someone!" He giggled. "I order the fibula and femur to locomote and HUMM two three four, Humm, two-three four—we walk around the block. There!"

Harris grinned.

"It's a fifty-fifty fight. Even-steven. And we'll fight it out, we two, we shall. After all, I'm the part that thinks!" That was good, it was a triumph, he'd remember that. "Yes. By God, yes. I'm the part that thinks. If I didn't have you, even then I could still think!"

Instantly, he felt a pain strike his head. His cranium, crowding in slowly, began giving him some of his own treatment right back.

At the end of the week he had postponed the Phoenix trip because of his health. He weighed himself on a penny scales and watched the slow glide of the red arrow as it pointed to: "164."

He groaned. "Why I've weighed 175 for ten years. I can't have lost ten pounds." He examined his cheeks in the fly-dotted mirror. Cold primitive fear rushed over him in odd little shivers. "Hold on! I know what're you're about, you."

He shook his finger at his bony face, particularly addressing his remarks to his superior maxillary, his inferior maxillary, to his cranium and to his cervical vertebrae. "You rum thing, you. Think you can starve me off, make me lose weight, eh? A victory for you, is it? Peel the flesh off, leave nothing but skin on bone. Trying to ditch me, so you can be supreme, ah? No, no!"

He fled into a cafeteria immediately.

Ordering turkey, dressing, potatoes, cream, three desserts he soon found he could not eat it, he was sick to his stomach. He forced himself. His teeth began to ache. "Bad teeth, is it?" he wanted to know, angrily. "I'll eat in spite of every tooth clanging and banging and rotting so they fall in my gravy."

His head ached, his breathing came hard from a constricted chest, his teeth pulsed with pain, but he had one small victory. He was about to drink milk when he stopped and poured it into a vase of nasturtiums. "No calcium for you, my boy, no more calcium for you. Never will I eat foods again with calcium or other bone-fortifying minerals in them. I'll eat for one of us, not both, my lad."

"One hundred and fifty pounds," he wailed the following week to his wife. "Do you see how I've changed?"

"For the better," said Clarisse. "You were always a little plump, for your height, darling." She stroked his chin. "I like your face, it's so much nicer, the lines of it are so firm and strong now."

"They're not MY lines, they're his, damn him! You mean to say you like him better than you like me?" he demanded indignantly.

"Him? Who's him?"

**I**N THE parlor mirror, beyond Clarisse, his skull smiled back at him behind his fleshy grimace of hatred and despair.

Fuming, he popped malt tablets into his mouth. This was one way of gaining weight when you couldn't eat other foods. Clarisse noticed the malt capsules. "But, darling, really, you don't have to regain the weight for me," she said.

"Oh, shut up!" he felt like saying.

She came over to him and sat down and made him lie so his head was in her lap. "Darling," she said, "I've watched you lately. You're so—badly off. You don't say anything, but you look—hunted. You toss in bed at night. Maybe you should go to a psychiatrist. But I think I can tell you everything he would say. I've put it all together, from hints you've dropped. I can tell you that you and your skeleton are one and the same, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. United you stand, divided you fall. If you two fellows can't get along like an old married couple in the future, go back and see Dr. Burleigh. But, *first*, relax. You're in a vicious circle, the more you worry, the more your bones stick out, the more your bones stick out, the more you fret. After all, now, who picked this fight—you or that anonymous entity you claim is lurking around behind your alimentary canal?"

He closed his eyes. "I did: I guess I did. Oh, my darling I love you so."

"You rest now," she said softly. "Rest and forget."

Mr. Harris felt buoyed up for half a day, then he began to sag again. It was all right to say everything was imagination, but this particular skeleton, by God, was fighting back.

Harris set out for M. Munigant's office late in the day. He walked for half an hour

until he found the address, and then, at the sight of the name M. Munigant initialled in gold on a glass sign outside, Harris' bones seemed to explode from their moorings, blasted and erupted with pain. He could hardly see in his wet, pain-filled eyes. So violent were the pains that Harris staggered away, and when he opened his eyes again, he had rounded a corner, and M. Munigant's office was out of sight. The pains ceased.

M. Munigant, then, was the man to help him. He must be! If the sight of his gilt-lettered name could cause so titanic reaction in the deepness of Harris' body, why, of course, M. Munigant *must* be just the man.

But, not today. Each time he tried to return to that office, the terrible pains layed him low. Perspiring, he had to give up, and stagger into a beer saloon for respite.

Moving across the floor of the beer palace, he wondered briefly if a lot of blame couldn't be put on M. Munigant's shoulders; after all, it was Munigant who'd first drawn his attention to his skeleton, and brought home the entire psychological impact of it! Could M. Munigant be using him for some nefarious purpose? But what purpose? Silly to even suspect him. Just a little doctor. Trying to be helpful. Munigant and his jar of bread-sticks. Ridiculous. M. Munigant was okay, okay.

**B**UT there was a sight within the beer parlor to give him hope. A large fat man, round as a butterball stood drinking consecutive beers at the bar. Now here was a successful fellow for you. Harris momentarily repressed a desire to go up, clap him on his shoulder and enquire as to how he'd gone about impounding his bones. Yes, the fat man's skeleton was luxuriously closeted. There were pillows of fat here, resilient bulges of it there, with several round chandeliers of fat under his chin. The poor skeleton was lost, it could never fight clear of that blubber; it may have tried once—but now, overwhelmed, not a bony echo of the fat man's supporter remained.

Not without envy, Harris approached the fat man as one might cut across the bow of an ocean liner.

"Glands?" inquired Harris.

"You talking to me?" asked the fat man.

"Or is there a special diet?" wondered Harris. "I beg your pardon, but, as you see, I'm down to the marrow. Adding weight seems an impossibility. I'd like a belly like that one of yours, it's tops. Did you grow it because you were afraid?"

"You," announced the fat man, "are drunk. But I like drunkards." He ordered more drinks. "Listen close. I'll tell you—"

"Layer by layer," said the fat man, "twenty years, man and boy, I built this." He held his vast stomach like a globe of the world, teaching his audience its gastronomical geography. It was no overnight circus. The tent was not raised before dawn on the wonders installed within. I have cultivated my inner organs as if they were thoroughbred dogs, cats and other animals. My stomach is a fat pink Persian tom slumbering, rousing at intervals to purr, mew, growl and cry for chocolate titbits. I feed it well, it will most sit up for me. And, my dear fellow, my intestines are the rarest pure-bred Indian anacondas you ever viewed in the sleekest, coiled, fine and ruddy health. Keep 'em in prime, I do, all my pets. For fear of something? Perhaps?"

This called for another drink for everybody.

"Gain weight?" The fat man savored the words on his tongue. "Here's what you do. Get yourself a quarreling bird of a wife, a baker's dozen of relatives who can flush a covey of troubles out from behind the veriest molehill; add to these a sprinkling of business associates whose prime motivation is snatching your last lonely quid, and you are well on your way to getting fat. How so? In no time you'll begin subconsciously building fat betwixt yourself and them. A buffer epidermal state, a cellular wall.

You'll soon find that eating is the only fun on earth. But one needs to be bothered by outside sources. Too many people in this world haven't enough to worry about, then they begin picking on *themselves*, and they lose weight. Meet all of the vile, terrible people you can possibly know, and pretty soon you'll be adding the good old fat."

And with that advice, the fat man launched himself out into the dark tide of night, swaying mightily and wheezing.

"That's exactly what Dr. Burleigh told me, slightly changed," said Harris thought-

fully. "Perhaps that trip to Phoenix at this time—"

THE trip from Frisco to Phoenix was a sweltering one, crossing, as it did, the Death Valley on a broiling yellow day. It was only to be hoped that Mr. Creldon the man in Phoenix with the money would be in an inspired mood about lending an amount necessary to setting Mr. Harris up in his ceramics business.

The car moved in the hot sluice of desert wind. The one Mr. H. sat inside the other Mr. H. Perhaps both perspired. Perhaps both were miserable.

On a curve, the inside Mr. H. suddenly constricted the outer flesh, causing him to jerk forward on the hot steering wheel.

The car ran off the road into deepest sand. It turned half over.

Night came on, a wind rose, the road was lonely and silent with no traffic, and Mr. Harris lay unconscious until night roused a sandstorm out of the empty valleys.

Morning found him awake and gritty-eyed, wandering in circles, having somehow gotten away from the road, perhaps because sand had layered it over. At noon he sprawled in the poor shade of a bush, and the sun struck at him with a keen sword edge, seeping into his bones. A buzzard circled.

Harris' parched lips cracked open weakly. "So that's it," he whimpered, red-eyed, bristle-checked. "One way or another you'll wreck me, walk me, starve me, thirst me, kill me." He swallowed dry burrs of dust. "Sun cook off my flesh so you can peek forth. Vultures lunch and breakfast from me, and then there you'll lie, grinning. Grinning with victory. Like a bleached xylophone strewn and played by vultures with an ear for odd music. You'd like that, eh? Freedom."

He walked on and on through a landscape that shivered and bubbled in the direct pour of sunlight; stumbling, falling, lying to feed himself little mouths of flame. The air was blue alcohol flame; and vultures roasted and steamed and glittered as they flew in glides and circles. Phoenix. The road. Car. Safety. Water.

"Hey!" somebody called from way off in the blue alcohol flame.

Mr. Harris propped himself up.

"Hey!" somebody called again. A crunching of footsteps, quick.

With a cry of unbelievable relief, Harris rose, only to collapse again into a park ranger's arms.

The car tediously repaired, Phoenix reached, Harris found himself in such an unholy state of mind that any business transaction would have to wait. This business of the Thing within him like a hard white sword in its scabbard tainted his eating, colored his love for Clarisse, made it unsafe to trust an automobile; all in all it must be settled before he could have any love for business or anything! That desert incident had brushed too closely. Too near the bone, one might say with an ironic twist of one's mouth. Harris grimly phoned Mr. Creldon, apologized, turned his car around and motored along a safer route to Los Angeles, thence up the coast to Frisco. He didn't trust that desert. But—careful! Salt waves boomed, hissing on the beach as he drove through Santa Barbara. Sand, fish and crustacia would cleanse his bones as swiftly as vultures. Slow down on the curves over the surf.

If anything happened, he desired casket burial. The two of them'd rot together, that way! Damn Him! And what about this little man—M. Munigant? Bone specialist. Oh God, where was one to turn?

"Darling!" trilled Clarisse, kissing him so he winced at the solidness of her teeth and jaw behind the passionate exchange.

"Darling," he said slowly, wiping his lips with his wrist, trembling.

"You look thinner; oh, darling, the business deal—it didn't go through!"

"I have to go back again. Yes, I have to go back again. That's it."

SHE kissed him again. Lord, he couldn't even kiss her any more and enjoy it because of this obsession. They ate a slow, unhappy dinner, with Clarisse trying to cheer him. He studied the phone, several times he picked it up indecisively, then laid it aside. His wife walked in, putting on her coat and hat. "I'm sorry to have to leave now, when you're feeling so low. But I'll be back in three hours from the Red Cross. I simply *have* to go."

When Clarisse was gone, Harris dialed the phone, nervously.

"Mr. Munigant?"

THE explosions and the sickness in his body after he set the phone down were unbelievable. His bones were racked with every kind of pain, cold and hot, he had every thought of, or experienced in wildest nightmare. He swallowed as many aspirin as he could find in an effort to stave off the assault; but when the door-bell finally rang an hour later, he could not move, he lay weak and exhausted, panting, tears streaming down his cheeks, like a man on a torture rack. Would M. Munigant go away if he didn't answer the door?

"Come in!" he tried to gasp it out. "Come in, for God's sake!"

M. Munigant came in. Thank God the door had been unlocked.

Oh, but Mr. Harris looked terrible. Harris nodded. The pains rushed through him, hitting him with large iron hammers and hooks. M. Munigant's eyes glittered as he saw Harris' protuberant bones. Ah, he saw that Mr. Harris was now psychologically prepared for aid. Was it not so? Harris nodded again, feebly, sobbing. Through his shimmering eyes he seemed to see M. Munigant shrink, get smaller. Imagination of course. Harris sobbed out his story of the trip to Phoenix. M. Munigant sympathized. This skeleton was a—traitor! They would FIX him once and for all! "Mister Munigant," sighed Harris, faintly. "I never noticed before, you have such an odd tongue. Round. Tube-like. I'm ready. What do I do?"

If Mr. Harris would relax in his chair, and open his mouth? M. Munigant whistled softly, appreciatively, coming closer. He switched off the lights, peering into Harris' dropped jaw. Wider, please? It had been so hard, the first time, to help Harris, with both body and bone in rebellion. Now, he had cooperation from the flesh of the man anyway, even if the skeleton was acting up somewhat. In the darkness M. Munigant's voice got small, small, tiny, tiny. The whistling became high and shrill. Now. Relax, Mr. Harris. NOW!

Harris felt his jaw pressed violently in all directions, his tongue depressed as with a



spoon, his throat clogged. He gasped for breath. Whistle. He could not breathe. He was corked. Something squirmed, cork-screwed his cheeks out, bursting his jaws. Like a hot water douche, something squirted into his sinuses, his ears clanged! "Ahhhh!" shrieked Harris, gagging. His head, its carapaces riven, shattered, hung loose. Agony shot into his lungs, around.

Harris could breath again. His watery eyes sprang wide. He shouted. His ribs, like sticks picked up and bundled, were loosened in him. Pain! He fell to the floor, rocking, rolling, wheezing out his hot breath.

Lights flickered in his senseless eyeballs, he felt his limbs unloosened swiftly, expertly. Through steaming eyes he saw the parlor. The room was empty.

"Mr. Munigant? Where are you? In God's name, where are you, Mr. Munigant! Come help me!"

M. Munigant was gone!

"Help!"

Then he heard it.

Deep down in the subterranean fissures of his bodily well, he heard the minute, unbelievable noises; little smackings and twistings little dry chippings and grindings and nuzzling sounds—like a tiny hungry mouse down in the red blooded dimness, gnawing ever so earnestly and expertly at what may have been, but was not, a submerged timber. . . .!

CLARRISSE, walking along the sidewalk, held her head high and marched straight toward her house on Saint James Place. She was thinking of the Red Cross and a thou-

sand other things as she turned the corner and almost ran into this little man standing there.

Clarisse would have ignored him if it were not for the fact that as she passed he took something long, white and oddly familiar from his coat and proceeded to chew on it, as on a peppermint stick. Its end devoured, his extraordinary tongue darted within the white confection, sucking out the filling, making contented noises. He was still crunching his goodie as she proceeded up the sidewalk to her house, turned the doorknob and walked in.

"Darling?" she called, smiling around.

"Darling, where are you?"

She shut the door, walked down the hall into the living room.

"Darling . . ."

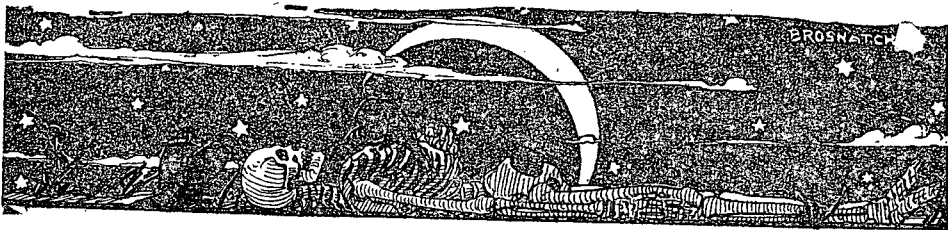
She stared at the floor for twenty seconds, trying to understand.

She screamed. That scream came from her like a ghastly white fish torn from her vitals by some ungodly fisherman.

Outside in the sycamore darkness, the little man, pierced a long white stick with intermittent holes, then softly, sighing, lips puckered, played a little sad tune upon the improvised instrument to accompany the shrill and awful singing of Clarisse's voice as she stood in the living room.

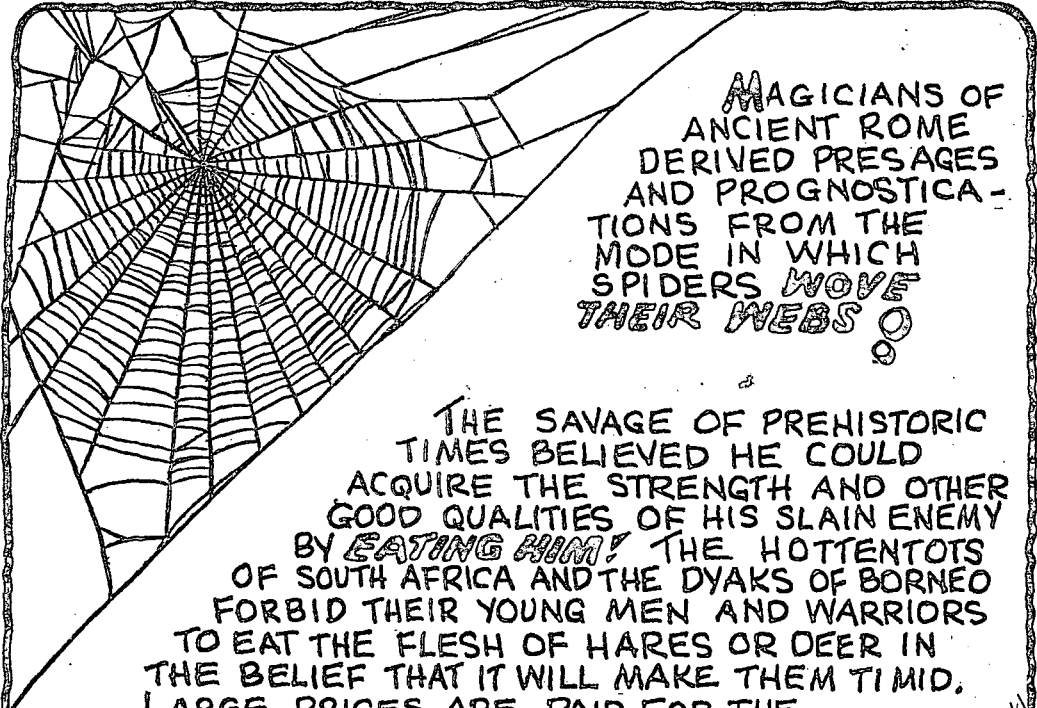
Many times as a little girl Clarrise had run on the beach sands, stepped on a jelly fish and screamed. It was not so bad, finding an intact, gelatin-skinned jelly-fish in one's living room. One could step back from it.

It was when the jelly-fish called you by name. . . .



# Superstitions and Taboos

by Weill



MAGICIANS OF  
ANCIENT ROME  
DERIVED PRESAGES  
AND PROGNOSTICA-  
TIONS FROM THE  
MODE IN WHICH  
SPIDERS WOVE  
THEIR WEBS

THE SAVAGE OF PREHISTORIC  
TIMES BELIEVED HE COULD  
ACQUIRE THE STRENGTH AND OTHER  
GOOD QUALITIES OF HIS SLAIN ENEMY  
BY **EATING HIM!** THE HOTTENTOTS  
OF SOUTH AFRICA AND THE DYAKS OF BORNEO  
FORBID THEIR YOUNG MEN AND WARRIORS  
TO EAT THE FLESH OF HARES OR DEER IN  
THE BELIEF THAT IT WILL MAKE THEM TIMID.  
LARGE PRICES ARE PAID FOR THE  
FLESH OF THE LION OR TIGER SO  
THAT THEY MAY ACQUIRE  
THE **SAGACITY**  
**STRENGTH AND**  
**COURAGE OF**  
THESE ANIMALS

