

THE GREEN MAN

SHORT STORY BY IRENE DOWSING

She had seen three flying saucers: What was she going to do about it?

THE night the "flying saucer" landed in our side paddock I was alone at the cottage.

Grant, my husband, had received a telegram in the morning from his chief in the research department requiring his presence "urgently and immediately" but promising that this was only an interruption and not a curtailment of the holiday we had banked on for so many months.

"Coming with me?" asked Grant after we had both finished saying a number

we had both finished saying a number of unpleasant words about the chief.

I shook my head. "I don't think so. I'd be bored. Besides I want to work."

"But you can't stay here alone."

"Why can't I?"

"You'd be scared. Miles from anywhere . . . no telephone. No, you'd

better go pack your toothbrush while I get out the car."

"I'll stay," I decided. "Once we both got back to the city that would be the end of our holiday. The chief would find some reason to keep you there. If I wait here he'll have to let you come back."

Grant looked undecided. Finally he said: "All right. If that's how you want it. But I won't take the car. I'm not going to leave you here without means of transport. You can drive me to the station. There's a train at 12.30, and I'll catch the train back in the morning. You can meet it. And for heaven's

You can meet it. And for heaven's sake take care of yourself tonight. Don't leave the lamp burning or throw lighted cigarettes round before you go to bed. What'll you do while I'm gone?"

I waved a hand at the portable typewriter. The table on which it stood was already littered with typed sheets and newspaper cuttings.

"Work. Don't worry about me. I'll probably type all night. I've always wanted to."

I drove Grant to the station. As I saw his face framed in the carriage window I had a momentary pang. I should have been going with him.

But once back in the cottage I felt glad I had stayed. The cottage was a retreat he and I had bought six years before. Its main distinctions were its lack of amenities and its isolation. Here for a short space each year we retired to live in peace, and for both of us the charm of the holiday depended on our

charm of the holiday depended on our leaving the world and its worries behind. We walked, fished and swam in the river, slept the clock round, and had no daily newspaper and no radio. But this year I hadn't played quite fair. I had brought my working gear so that I could finish a biography which was wanted in exactly three weeks' time. I knew that my preoccupation with it was irritating Grant. Probably if I worked the rest of the day and night I could polish it off before he arrived back.

Fortified by lunch and two cups of black coffee I sat down to the machine. Several hours later I paused to make a cup of tea. Everything was going well. I could afford to take a breather, and, feeling rather hungry, cut slices of bread and butter and spread them liberally with cheese. While eating these I gazed pensively through the sitting-room window. Fading sunlight bathed

the lemon grove with flickering leafy shadows. A few birds chirped and fluttered among the leaves. It was all very peaceful. Then for no reason that I can explain I began to feel unsettled. I went out into the lemon grove.

From now on this story is going to be hard to tell. The only thing I can do is to put down each incident as it happened, or as it appeared to me to happen.

Almost as I reached the grove I saw them—three disk-shaped apparitions high in the sky flying meteor-like with incredible speed towards the west. They disappeared into the rosy glow of the setting sun. I strained my eyes after them. There was nothing. . . . There had been no sound.

After watching the sky for a while I went inside and walked up and down the sitting-room mentally arguing with myself. The "flying saucers" had been an optical illusion. I was staring into the sun. No, I wasn't when I first saw

them. Then they were some new type of aircraft. Travelling at that speed and soundless? No, again. Well, they were meteors. Three symmetrically

Before me loomed a huge black shape . . .

identical meteors flying in formation? No, not meteors. All right, then, let's face it; they were flying saucers.

At this point I sat down and lit a cigarette. I had seen three flying saucers. What was I going to do about it? Join the band of people who excitedly telephoned newspapers and observatories? No, not that. All the same, I felt as if I must get into touch with someone, and on an impulse made for the garage. I would drive into the town and casually inquire if anyone else had seen them.

The car wouldn't start. Don't ask me why. Everything seemed all right. All I know is that it wouldn't budge for me, but it started up immediately for Grant the next day.

At this stage I took myself well in

At this stage I took myself well in hand. The three things I had seen, I told myself, were not flying saucers; they were rockets, or some experiment by the defence department. I resolved to forget about them and make some tea. I prepared quite a creditable meal and ate it with a book propped against the teapot. But twice during the meal I stopped reading, went to the back door and peered into the darkening sky.

AFTER washing up and lighting the lamp I felt better. I settled myself at the typewriter for the night, and was thoroughly absorbed in what I was typing when a blinding flash of light lit up the room. The cottage seemed to sway slightly. My fingers which had been typing felt as if they had received an electric shock. A wave of warm air almost like a tangible thing hit against me. The lamp went out.

For quite a while I sat there listening to noises as the house and its contents adjusted themselves. On the surface

adjusted themselves. On the surface of my mind I thought "an earth tremor, how horrible," but underneath was the certainty that this was no earth tremor.

I groped over the table for matches and knocked them to the floor. Then I reached for the electric torch which should have been on the bookcase. It was, but it refused to function. I staggered to my feet, felt round the floor until I found the matches, and relit the lamp. Then I stood quite still for several seconds. The odd thing was that I should have been in a terrible panic, yet I wasn't.

I became possessed of a growing excitement and such an intense curiosity that all other feelings were dwarfed. I had to know what was out there. Whatever happened I had to.

I went into the kitchen and lit the hurricane lamp. The next thing I knew I was running through the lemon orchard towards the paddock. The light from my lantern bobbed up and down on the uneven ground. Before I left

on the uneven ground. Before I left the shelter of the trees I paused, peering as far as I could into the moonlit paddock.

Coming towards me was a figure.

Beyond it loomed a huge black motionless shape.

I moved forward.

The figure walked into the circle of light thrown by my lantern. It was a man about four feet in height, and he was green. We stopped within a short distance of each other.

I lifted the lantern so that I could look into his face.

After my first proper glimpse of him everything went black for me, and I thought "I'm going to faint," but I didn't lose consciousness. When my eyes cleared I was still standing rigidly upright holding the lantern.

He had not moved.

I knew that the hardest part of this

narrative would come with an attempt to describe his appearance, and it has. Words can convey such a wrong impression. Those I shall have to use will make him seem grotesque, but, in spite of the fact that he was like nothing I had seen or imagined, he was not grotesque. That may have been because of his eyes. They were calm, deepset, dark green with flecks of yellow light, and more intelligent than any I had seen. Although by now the whole experience had taken on the unreality of a nightmare I wasn't afraid of him. Why I wasn't I don't know. Looking back I am inclined to think that my lack of panic was one of the strangest anomalies of that weird night.

Barely three feet to the tip of the chin in height his torso was dominated by a dome-like head. It was quite hairless and shone with a kind of green luminosity. There were no visible ears. The face was small, with

delicate features, the rest of his body, though lightly-built, was well proportioned. He wore a garment closely resembling a diving suit, with furry gloves. The head-piece he had tucked under his arm.

Before I realised the futility of talking to him in English, or for that matter any language on earth, I had burst into a spate of questions.

"Where are you from? What made you land here? Did you crash?"

I waited expectantly to see how he reacted to my high-pitched excited voice.

He made no sound, but just continued to watch me with those calm interested eyes.

During the silence the answers to my questions formed in my mind. *He had come from a place about which he would let me know something later. No, he had not crashed. He had landed because of an overwhelming curiosity. There was no need for me to*

be afraid. All he wanted was to see at close quarters one of the people on this planet.

Thus began what was surely the strangest converse yet held by any two people on this earth. He had spoken to me without words. And he knew what I was thinking. As the full implication of what had occurred dawned on me I stared back at him open-mouthed. Something happened to his eyes then that gave the impression of a smile, though the small beautifully shaped mouth had not moved. It was as if he said "Thoughts don't need a language, you know."

I STARTED to tremble. Up to that moment I had been dazed and stunned, but at the same time so curious that I had felt no personal fear. For some time past in common with many other people I had taken for granted that it was within the realms of possibility that the inhabitants of other planets could be trying to get in touch

planets could be trying to get in touch with earth. To me there was nothing illogical or supernatural about that. But believing that all phenomena had a natural explanation I had always avoided anything even remotely suggestive of the occult. What unnerved me was the green man's apparent ability to read my thoughts and transfer his own to me. I shuddered violently, and would have dropped the lantern if he hadn't moved over and taken it from me. His hand as it brushed mine was icy cold.

I looked at him uncertainly. Obviously we could not stand there all night. We were ten miles from the township, four from the nearest house. There was no telephone, and there was something wrong with the car.

I was stranded with this strange being from another world.

Almost automatically I started walking towards the house. I think I had some vague idea that when I reached

some vague idea that when I reached its shelter and warmth I would be more able to cope with the situation. Still holding the lantern the green man walked with me. He seemed to take it for granted that he should come. And, indeed, short of his taking himself and his flying saucer off the way he had come I didn't see what else there was for him to do. I looked back over my shoulder. The thing still loomed a large black shape against moonlit space. Oddly enough, I had no desire to see it any closer. I suppose a man would have been tremendously interested in this vehicle from outer space, but at the time I was far too concerned with the green man himself to give much thought to his means of transit.

We went through the kitchen into the living room. I pointed to one chair. and sank into the other myself. He hesitated for a moment, then sat down.

hesitated for a moment, then sat down. Walking with him I hadn't been so conscious of his smallness. Low-seated though the chair was his feet did not reach the floor. He had removed his gloves, and it was then that I noticed his hands. The long thin green fingers were without nails.

It's of no use to ask, as I subsequently asked myself, why I didn't rush wildly away . . . anywhere . . . at the first sight of him, nor why I made absolutely no effort to get in touch with someone responsible that night. I simply did what I felt impelled to do at the time

DURING those first few minutes sitting opposite him all sorts of thoughts flooded my mind. I visualised the sensation the green man would have caused if he had landed in some populated area. I pictured the headlines that, once his presence became known, would splash across world newspapers, the dramatic radio broadcasts, the flutterings of international plotters and the

things of international politics and the excitement among scientists. Or would he be hustled off somewhere quietly and the news of his arrival hushed up, or denied? Would he be "detained" for experiment? Would he be allowed to leave?

I looked up to find his eyes fixed on me gravely. There seemed to be something he was anxious for me to understand. And in a moment or two I knew what it was. *I was not to be alarmed by his ability to make me aware of his thoughts, nor by his awareness of mine. There was nothing miraculous about it. It was simply a natural law that had been developed to full advantage on his planet. It was the only way he could communicate with me. He wished me to stop being nervous.*

His eyes were remarkably reassuring. They were unfathomable, intelligent and kind. Looking at them I found it easy to believe that they betokened a depth of wisdom and an understanding of things not even dreamed of here. The

of things not even dreamed of here. The tension in my mind and body relaxed.

I wondered about the flying saucers I had seen that afternoon. Had they too come from his planet?

They had. His planet had been watching ours for a long time.

Impressions of a people far in advance of ours in mechanical and psychological development seeped into my consciousness. It seemed to me possible that the green man and his kind were almost as far ahead of us as we of our first cavemen. Did they know the secret of atomic fission? Did they know what we were doing here?

They knew.

I had the feeling that to the green man what was happening now on this earth was like dipping back in time to the ancient history of his own planet.

It is hard to remember all the details of the interchange of thought between us. Impressions came into my mind, some as fleeting as pictures on a screen

... as meeting as pictures on a screen and others as deeper knowledge that remained. I asked questions, mostly, from habit, aloud, but sometimes I just puzzled wordlessly over something. The result, with two exceptions, was the same. In a moment or so I had the answer. I knew what I wanted to know. It was as simple as that.

But there were two questions he did not answer.

“What is your planet called?”

“Will you tell me your name?”

The light flecks in his eyes danced. It seemed as if he was waiting for me to understand. And suddenly it did.

You can't translate names into thoughts.

He took something from a pocket in the black tunic and held it towards me on the palm of his hand. It was a translucent gem about the size of a child's marble, and it glowed with a faint colour, or variation of colour, that was new to me. I had seen nothing like it. He dropped it into my hand.

After examining it a while I held it out to him, but he remained motionless. His eyes smiled. *He wished me to keep it.* I laid it on the table in the centre of a fresh sheet of typing paper.

He became interested in my typewriter and the typewritten sheets. He picked up a newspaper cutting with a photograph of the man whose biography I was writing, and looked at it searchingly.

One thing in particular began to puzzle me. Had the people from where he came always communicated by thought instead of words.

They had not.

HE stopped looking at the photograph and concentrated his eyes on me as if I had raised an important point that deserved his full attention.

Once they had had a language, in fact several languages.

His eyes became like pools of pale green light with their dark pupils re-

mote yet compelling. I found them easy to watch.

“How did you come to use thought?” I said aloud.

During a long dangerous period much earlier in his planet's history words had been used extravagantly and untruthfully to influence the minds of people. People were fooled, time and time again, until at length they grew distrustful of the spoken word. It became a habit, while listening to a man talk, to think “Yes, that's what he says, but what does he mean?” The endeavour to get past words to the truth behind them developed over a long period of time an extra sense, the ability to receive and transmit thoughts. People became more and more wary of words, and more and more reliant on this new medium. The only ones who tried to stick tenaciously to words were those who had something to hide. The great museum on his planet was full of early records dealing with the centuries during which the transition took place. Truth

which the transition took place. Truth gradually became the pivot round which everything revolved. It was this extra sense that marked the turning point in the planet's history. Wars became impracticable and then impossible. Discoveries were used for

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the overall benefit of the planet. With no fear of internal disruption, scientists were able to turn their thoughts outwards to the universe. Adventure for the people on his planet lay in the penetration of outer space.

AT this stage the green man paused. The flow of thought was interrupted. Suddenly he leant across the table and his whole attitude became tense. It was as if he were marshalling all his power of thought to impress on me

power of thought to impress on me something which he considered vital. For the first time he seemed to speak to me directly, almost with words.

"You on this planet have reached a critical period. It is a point we reached a very long time ago. We took the right turning. Otherwise we should have ceased to exist."

A cold air had drifted into the room. I felt very tired. His eyes became like a calm green sea gently drowning further thought.

Grant's anxious face hovered mistily near me. Lifting a hand I touched his cheek to make sure he was really there. Then I looked about me. I was lying fully dressed on the bed in our room.

"Whatever's the matter?" Grant was saying. "I've had a terrible job to waken you. Why didn't you meet the train? I was frantic when an hour went by and there was no sign of you. I paid a chap to drive me out. For heaven's sake, what happened?"

"Have you seen the green man?" I

"Have you seen the green man?" I asked.

"What!"

"Where is he?" I began to get excited. "Isn't he here?"

I ran into the sitting room. No-one was there. Grant caught me as I was making for the back door. He carried me to the sofa and sat with me on his knee.

"Now stop it," he said. "Calm down and tell me quickly what all this is about. Otherwise I'll shake the life out of you."

As coherently as I could I told him.

He pressed his face against my hair. I knew he was smiling.

"Darling," he said, "you do have the most entertaining nightmares. That was quite a story."

Was it?

I became very quiet.

Then just to prove conclusively to me that I had been dreaming he went with

that I had been dreaming he went with me to the paddock where the flying saucer had landed. Even as we walked through the lemon grove I could see that it wasn't there. I hadn't expected it to be.

"Obviously," Grant was saying, "you dreamt the whole thing. Nothing of that sort could land in a paddock and take off without leaving some sign."

He stopped abruptly. Ahead of us lay a wide circle of charred grass.

"That's nothing," he said hurriedly. "There could be a number of explanations for burnt grass."

"Yes," I said.

After he had looked round for a while we went back to the house.

Inside the sitting room I called him over to the typing table.

"I forgot to tell you," I said. "He gave me this."

There on a sheet of white paper lay a translucent gem about the size of a child's marble and it glowed with a

child's marble, and it glowed with a faint colour, or variation of colour, that was new to me. It was new to Grant too. He looked at it for a long time without speaking.