

Title

Beyond the Vanishing Point

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They Opened the Pandora`s Box of Atomic Trevel

When George Randolph first caught sight of Orena, he was astounded by its gleaming perfection. Here were hills and valleys, lakes and streams, glowing with the light of the most precious of metals. And, more astonishing than that, it was a world of miniature perfection - an infinitely tiny universe within a golden atom!

But for Randolph it was also a world aglow with danger. Somewhere in its tiny vastness were the friends he had to rescue. Captives of a madman, they had been reduced to native Orena size; to return to Earth they needed the growth capsules Randolph was bringing them. It was up to Randolph to find them - and quickly - for the longer they stayed tiny, the closer they came to passing *BEYOND THE VANISHING POINT*.

Cast of Characters

FRANZ POLTER - He found a gold mine in a land where there was no gold.

DR. KENT - His scientific studies could mean life or death to an entire universe!

GEORGE RANDOLPH - He crossed the border into Canada, and found himself in another world.

ALAN KENT - Twenty feet tall, or two inches high - which should he be?

GLORA - She was only as large as a thumbnail, but she carried a gigantic secret.

BABS KENT - Did she live in a golden cage or a magnificent palace?

BEYOND THE VANISHING POINT

CHAPTER I

It was shortly after noon of December 31, 1970, when the series of weird and startling events began which took me into the tiny world of an atom of gold, beyond the vanishing point, beyond the range of even the highest-powered electric-microscope. My name is George Randolph. I was, that momentous afternoon, assistant chemist for the Ajax International Dye Company, with main offices in New York City.

It was twelve-twenty when the local exchange call-sorter announced Alan's connection from Quebec.

"Hello, George? Look here, you've got to come up here at once. Chateau Frontenac, Quebec. Will you come?"

I could see his face imaged in the little mirror on my desk; the anxiety, tenseness in his voice, was duplicated in his expression.

"Well -" I began.

"You must, George. Babs and I need you. See here"

He tried at first to make it sound like an invitation for a New Year's Eve holiday. But I knew it was not that. Alan and Barbara were my best friends. They were twins, eighteen years old. I felt that Alan would always be my best friend; but for Babs, my hopes, longings, went far deeper, though as yet I had never brought myself to the point of telling her so.

"I'd like to come, Alan. But -"

"You've got to George! I can't tell you everything over the public air. But I've seen him: He's diabolical. I know it now!"

Him! It could only mean, of all the world, one person!

"He's here!" he went on. "Near here. We saw him today! I didn't want to tell you, but that's why we came. It seemed a long chance, but it's he, I'm positive!"

I was staring at the image of Alan's eyes; there was horror in them. And his voice too. "God, George, it's weird! Weird, I tell you. His looks - he - oh I can't tell you now! Only, come!"

I was busy at the office in spite of the holiday season, but I dropped everything and went. By one o'clock that afternoon I was wheeling my little sport Midge from its cage on the roof of the Metropole building, and went into the air.

It was a cold gray afternoon with the feel of coming snow. I made a good two hundred and fifty miles at first, taking the northbound through-traffic lane which today the meteorological conditions had placed at an altitude of 6,200 feet.

Flying is largely automatic. There was not enough traffic to bother me. The details of leaving the office so hastily had been too engrossing for thought of Alan and Babs. But now, in my little pit at the controls, my mind flung ahead. They had located him. That meant Franz Polter, for whom we had been searching nearly four years. And my memory went back into the past with vivid vision

The Kents, four years ago, were living on Long Island. Alan and Babs were fourteen at the time, and I was seventeen. Even then Babs was something kind of special to me. I lived in a neighboring house that summer and saw them every day.

To my adolescent mind a thrilling mystery hung upon the Kent family. The mother was dead. Dr. Kent, father of Alan and Babs, maintained a luxurious home, with only a housekeeper and no other servant. Dr. Kent was a retired chemist. He had, in his home, a laboratory in which he was working upon some mysterious problem. His children did not know what it was, nor, of course, did I. And none of us had ever been in the laboratory, except that when occasion offered we stole surreptitious peeps.

I recall Dr. Kent as a kindly, iron-gray haired gentleman. He was stern with the discipline of his children; but he loved them, and was indulgent in many ways. They loved him; and I, an orphan, began looking upon him almost as a father. I was interested in chemistry. He knew it, and did his best to help and encourage me in my studies.

There came an afternoon in the summer of 1966, when arriving at the Kent home, I ran upon a startling scene. The only other member of the household was a young fellow of twenty-five, named Franz Polter. He was a foreigner, born, I understood, in one of the Balkan Protectorates; he was here, employed by Dr. Kent as laboratory assistant.

He had been with the Kents, at this time, two years. Alan and Babs didn't like him, nor did I. He must have been a clever, skillful chemist. No doubt he was. But he was, to us, repulsive. A hunchback, with a short, thick body; dangling arms that suggested a gorilla; barrel chest; a lump set askew on his left shoulder, and his massive head planted down with almost no neck. His face was rugged in feature; a wide mouth, a high-bridged heavy nose; and above the face a great shock of wavy black hair. It was an intelligent face; in itself, not repulsive.

But I think we all three feared Franz Polter. There was always something sinister about him, that had nothing to do with his deformity.

When I came, that afternoon, Babs and Polter were under a tree on the Kent lawn. Babs, at fourteen, with long black braids down her back, bare-legged and short-skirted in a summer sport costume, was standing against the tree with Polter facing her. They were about the same height. To my youthful imaginative mind rose the fleeting picture of a young girl in a forest menaced by a gorilla.

I came upon them suddenly. I heard Polter say:

"But I lof you. And you are almos' a woman. Some day you lof me."

He put out his thick hand and gripped her shoulder. She tried to twist away. She was frightened, but she laughed.

"You - you're crazy!"

He was suddenly holding her in his arms, and she was fighting him. I dashed forward. Babs was always a spunky sort of girl. In spite of her fear now, she kept on struggling, and she shouted:

"You - let me go, you - you hunchback!"

He did let her go; but in a frenzy of rage he hauled back his hand and struck her in the face. I was upon him the next second. I had him down on the lawn, punching him; but though at seventeen I was a reasonably husky lad, the hunchback with his thick, hairy gorilla arms proved much stronger. He heaved me off. The commotion had brought Alan and without waiting to find out what the trouble was, he jumped on Polter. Between us, I think we would have beaten him pretty badly. But the housekeeper summoned Dr. Kent and the fight was over.

Polter left for good within an hour. He did not speak to any of us. But I saw him as he put his luggage into the taxi which Dr. Kent had summoned. I was standing silently nearby with Babs and Alan. The look he flung us as he drove away carried an unmistakable menace - the promise of vengeance. And I think now that in his warped and twisted mind he was telling himself that he would someday make Babs regret that she had repulsed his love.

What happened that night none of us ever knew. Dr. Kent worked late in his laboratory; he was there when Alan and Babs and the housekeeper went to bed. He had written a note to Alan; it was found on his desk in a corner of the laboratory next morning, addressed in care of the family lawyer to be given Alan in the event of his death. It said very little. Described a tiny fragment of gold quartz rock the size of a walnut which would be found under the giant microscope in the laboratory; and told Alan to give it to the American Scientific Society to be guarded and watched very carefully.

This note was found, but Dr. Kent had vanished! There had been a midnight marauder. The laboratory was on the lower floor of the house. Through one of its open windows, so the police said, an intruder had entered. There was evidence of a struggle, but it must have been short, because neither Babs, Alan, the housekeeper, nor any of the neighbors had heard anything. And the fragment of golden quartz was gone!

The police investigation came to nothing. Polter was found in New York. He withstood the police questions. There was nothing except suspicion upon which he could be held, and he was finally released. Immediately thereafter, he disappeared.

Neither Alan, Babs nor I saw Polter again. Dr. Kent had never been heard from to this day, four years later when I flew to join the twins in Quebec. And now Alan told me that Polter was up there! We had never ceased to believe that Dr. Kent was alive, and that Polter was the midnight marauder. As we grew older, we began to search for Polter. It seemed to us, that if