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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DOORWAY \*\*\*

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*A discerning critic once pointed out that Edgar Allen Poe possessed not so much a distinctive style as a distinctive manner. So startlingly original was his approach to the dark castles and haunted woodlands of his own somber creation that he transcended the literary by the sheer magic of his prose. Something of that same magic gleams in the darkly-tapestried little fantasy presented here, beneath Evelyn Smith's eerily enchanted wand.*

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## the doorway

*by ... Evelyn E. Smith*

**A man may wish he'd married his first love and not really mean it. But an insincere wish may turn ugly in dimensions unknown.**

"IT IS my theory," Professor Falabella said, helping himself to a cookie, "that no one ever really makes a decision. What really happens is that whenever alternative courses of action are called for, the individuality splits up and continues on two or more divergent planes, very much like the parthenogenesis of a unicellular animal ... Delicious cookies these, Mrs. Hughes."

"Thank you, Professor," Gloria simpered. "I made them myself."

"You must give us the recipe," said one of the ladies—and the others murmured agreement, glad to get their individualities on a plane they could understand.

"Since most decisions are hardly as momentous as the individual imagines," Professor Falabella continued, "and since the imagination of the average individual is very limited, many of these different planes—or, as they are colloquially known, space-time continuums—may exist in close, even tangential relationship."

Gloria rose unobtrusively and took the teapot to the kitchen for a refill. Her husband stood by the sink moodily drinking whiskey out of the bottle so as to avoid having to wash a glass afterward.

"Bill, you're not being polite to our guests. Why don't you go out and listen to Professor Falabella?"

"I can hear him perfectly well from here," Bill muttered—and indeed the professor's mellifluous tones pervaded every nook and cranny of the thin-walled house. "Long-winded cultist! What is he a professor of, I'd like to know."

"Professor Falabella is *not* a cultist!" affirmed Gloria angrily. "He's a great philosopher."

Bill Hughes said something unprintable. "If I'd married Lucy Allison," he continued unkindly, "she'd never have filled the house with long-haired cultists on my so-called day of rest."

Gloria's soft chin trembled, and her blue eyes filled with tears. She was beginning to put on weight, he noticed. "I've been hearing nothing but Lucy Allison, Lucy Allison, Lucy Allison for the past year. Y-you said yourself she looked like a horse."

"Horses," he observed, "have sense."

He was being brutal, but he couldn't help it and didn't want to. Professor Falabella was only the most long-winded of a long series of mystics Gloria was forever dragging into the house. *The trouble with the half-educated, he thought bitterly, is that they seek culture in the most peculiar places.*

"I'll bet she would have let me have peace on Sunday," he said. "It just goes to show what happens when you marry a woman solely for her looks." He drained the bottle; then hurled it into the garbage pail with a resounding crash.

Gloria's shoulders shook as she filled the kettle. "I wish I'd decided to be an old maid," she sobbed.

A very unlikely possibility, he thought. Even now, shopworn as she was, Gloria could have a fairly wide range of suitors should something happen to him. She looked sexy, but how deceiving appearances could be!

Professor Falabella was still talking as Bill and Gloria emerged from the kitchen. "I believe that it is possible for an individual who exists on a limited plane of imagination to transpose from one plane to an adjacent one without difficulty ... Great Heavens, what was that?"

Something had whisked past the archway leading into the foyer.

"Don't pay any attention," Gloria smiled nervously. "The house is haunted."

"My dear," one of the ladies offered, "I know of the most marvelous exterminator—"

"The house," Gloria assured her coldly, "really *is* haunted. We've been seeing things ever since we moved in."

And she really believed it, Bill thought. Believed that the house was haunted, that is. Of course he had seen things too—but he was enlightened enough to know that ghosts don't exist, even if you do see them.

Professor Falabella cleared his throat. "As I was saying, it is possible to send the individual through another—well, dimension, as some popular writers would have it, to one of his other spatial existences on the same temporal plane. It is merely necessary for him to find the Door."

"Nonsense!" Bill interrupted. "Holy, unmitigated nonsense!"

Every head swivelled to look at him. Gloria restrained tears with an effort.

"Brute," someone muttered.

But ridicule apparently only stimulated the professor. He beamed. "You don't believe me. Your imagination cannot extend to the comprehension of the multifariousness of space."

"Nonsense," Bill said again, but less confidently.

"I believe that I have discovered the Doorway," Professor Falabella continued, "and the Way is Open. However, most people fear to penetrate the unknown, even though it is to enter another phase of their own existence. I do admit that the shock of spatial transference, no matter how slight, combined with the concrete awareness of a previous spatial relationship would be perhaps too much for the keenly sensitive individualism ..."

Bill opened his mouth.

"I know what you're about to say, young man!"

"You don't have to be a mind reader to know that," Bill assured him. His consonants were already a little slurred and he knew Gloria was ashamed of him. It served her right. He'd been ashamed of her for years.

Professor Falabella smiled. His teeth were very sharp and white. "Very well, Mr. Hughes, since you are a skeptic, perhaps you will not object to being the subject of our experiment yourself?"

"What kind of an experiment?" Bill asked suspiciously.

"Merely to go through the Door. Any door can become the Doorway, if it is transposed into the proper spatial dimension. That door, for instance." Professor Falabella waved his hand toward the doorway of what Gloria liked to call "Bill's study."

"You mean you just want me to open the door and go into that room?" Bill asked incredulously. "That's all?"

"That is all. Of course, you go with the awareness that it is the threshold of another plane and that you step voluntarily from this existence to an adjacent one."

"Sure," Bill said. He had just remembered there was a nearly full bottle of Calvert in the bottom drawer of the desk. "Sure. Anything to oblige."

"Very well. Go to the door, and keep remembering that of your own free will you are passing from this plane to the next."

"Look out, everybody!" Bill called raucously, as he pulled open the door. "I'm coming in on the next plane!"

No one laughed.

He stepped over the threshold, shutting the door firmly behind him. A wonderful excuse to get away from those blasted women. He'd climb out of the window as soon as he'd collected the

whiskey and give them a nervous moment thinking he'd really passed into another existence. It would serve Gloria right.

For a moment, as he crossed, he had a queer sensation. Maybe there was something in what Professor Falabella said. But no, there he was in the study. All that mumbo jumbo was getting him down, that was all. He was a nervous man—only nobody appreciated the fact.

Taking a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket, he reached for the lighter on his desk. It wasn't there. Time and time again he'd told Gloria not to touch his things, and always she'd disobeyed him. Company was coming and she must tidy up. Cooking and cleaning—that was all she was good for. But this was carrying tidiness too far; she'd even removed the ashtrays.

And where did that glass block paperweight come from? He'd had a penguin in a snowstorm and he'd been happy with it. This was too much. He'd tell Gloria off. Stealing a man's penguin!

He opened the door into the living room and bumped into Lucy Allison. "Don't you think you've been in there long enough, Bill?" she asked acridly. "I'm sure your guests would appreciate catching a glimpse of you."

"Why, hello, Lucy," he said, surprised. "I didn't know Gloria had invited you—"

"Gloria, Gloria, Gloria!" Lucy cut across his sentence. "You've been talking about nothing but that dumb little blonde for months." Because of the people in the room beyond, her voice was pitched low, but her pale eyes glittered unpleasantly behind her spectacles. "I wish you had married her. You'd have made a fine pair."

Gently, caressingly, the short hairs on the back of Bill's neck rose.

"Come back in here," Lucy said, hauling him back into the living room where a number of people who had been enjoying the domestic fracas suddenly broke into loud and animated chatter. "Dr. Hildebrand was telling us all about nuclear fission."

"Can't find an ashtray," Bill muttered, seizing on something tangible. "Can't find an ashtray in the whole darn place."

"We've been over this millions of times, Bill. You know—" she smiled at the guests, a smile that carefully excluded Bill. "—I'm allergic to smoke, but I never can get my husband to remember he isn't to smoke inside the house."

"Now take the neutron, for example," Dr. Hildebrand said through a mouthful of pâté. "What is the neutron? It is only ... What was that?"

The wraith of Gloria crossed the foyer and disappeared. Bill took a step forward; then stood still.

Lucy smiled self-consciously. "That's nothing at all. The house is merely haunted."

Everyone laughed.

"Forgot something," Bill muttered, and dashed back into the study. He yanked open the bottom drawer of the desk. Sure enough, there was a bottle of Schenley, nearly a third full. "There are some advantages," he thought as he tilted it to his lips, "in having a limited imagination."

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