

It is sad, but true, that many people will not believe in things they cannot see and touch. And because they do not believe, they can never see and must spend their lives in a semi-darkness unilluminated by the sparkling, dancing creatures who are the perpetual delight of children. Some grown-ups can see them, but few, very few. These incredulous, unbelieving people laugh at the mention of the Never-Never Land, simply because they cannot see it and cannot go there. Perhaps most of these people have never been to London, either. Are they *sure* there is such a place? This is a simple story, and it actually happened this way. Believe it or not, as you will.

IN THE first place, let me warn you—this is an extremely personal narrative and you'll be seeing a lot of the first person singular from now on. It's extremely personal because it concerns only me, Gwa O'Rourke and some of his pals.

Most writers, when they're confronted with the problem of telling of events in a vague limbo-land where men are seldom permitted to travel, can fall back on those convenient artifices of the trade and begin their stories, "I fell into a deep troubled sleep in which wind sounds and night and strange forms were all inextricably mixed, and when I awoke—."

I'm afraid I can't handle Gwa O'Rourke that way, because the first time I saw him he was working hard in the cold light of a normal day in a place far removed from fantasy and hazy dreams—I saw him in our research laboratories in St. Louis on one busy afternoon while chemists were busily engaged in cracking apart another tough problem. Gwa was energetically ladling acid out of a beaker and dumping it into another beaker, thereby effectively ruining an important experiment.

Now, I want it understood that I believe in leprechauns and pixies and elves and fairies, both good and bad, or I never would have seen Gwa that day. No one else saw him. And except for the fact that Gwa had a slight accident just then I never would have known him. Little people can be just as stupid and clumsy as we, and,

Gwa O'Rourke

The Story of the Ageless Elves that Haunt the Chemical Industry

By Johnny Keen

knowing this, I was not too surprised when Gwa leaned over the edge of the acid beaker to see how much more acid he could ladle out, and slipped. His feet went up and his head went down and he hung precariously over the edge of the beaker, unable to fall either in or out and helpless to move although he worked frantically with his hands and feet against the slickness of the glass walls. His benzene ring middle held him on one side, while his jack-knifed spindly legs held him on the other, and his round bottom agitated from side to side in his panic. Even chemists don't like to bathe in acid.

I plucked him off his glassy perch, put him in my pocket and retired to my office to examine my find. I put him down on the desk pad and he sat down heavily, clutching his stomach and breathing heavily. When he had recovered, he looked at me, got to his feet, and walked to the edge of the desk. He looked over, shivered at the sight of the drop before him, and walked to the other side. There was no way off, so he resignedly settled down behind my books to wait for something to happen. I whistled softly and his head popped out from behind the dictionary, then popped back again.

"Hey, you!" I called, "you behind that book! I can see you, you know, so come on out and let's have a look at

you." With my thumb and forefinger I pinched his jacket and pulled him out. That convinced him and he became formal and dignified. He removed his cap and bowed as gracefully as his generous mid-section would permit.

"Sikronik," he said, "fir mutsim copignatom gihuit dif, Gwa O'Rourke kilamerd li." He bowed again and replaced his cap.

"Gormaniggif," I replied, "hirtufid mi lert gasthutiss, le Johnny Keen firsignen."

We stared at each other in astonishment. I had understood him, and, what's more, had replied well enough for him to understand me. He had said, literally, "Bare-head-to-you, to me is acid killing stuff from which you kindly took, Gwa O'Rourke now becomes sun-to-plant." I had replied, "Water-to-mist, high is low, broad is wide, from Johnny Keen goes thankfulness." He had greeted me, then thanked me for saving his life and pledged his friendship and eternal service, and I had replied, "Forget it, pal, it's all the same to me, glad to do it any time."

From then on, we were friends, and for the next few weeks Gwa traveled with me and initiated me in the fine art of chemlinology. He told me ancient stories, for his people are as old as the world, and we spent many long hours together just talking of many things. When we went on the road he