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Untitled

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REGINALD HAYGOOD
Second Prize, Short Story

(UNTITLED)

Everything there is black or white. The sky is white, and the earth is white. The only way you can tell them apart is that they are divided by a black line which slopes downward as far as you can see. I lived there on this line with everyone like me. Also, everything else there is made of black lines; and except for the people, all the lines are straight and frozen. (Everyone there is made of lines too, like me—linear arms, linear legs, a linear body, and a recti-linear head; but, with all of us, our lines can move and bend except upon death; and then after a long time they become hard and rigid.) The trees are straight lines, and

the sun is made of straight lines like an incomplete parallelogram.

It started one time when I was a child there, and I was wandering down the earth's line and I came upon the dead body of one of us. It was lying in front of me, flat and linear and bent so that it was curved, and the feet almost reached the head. I looked at it, and I sat down and started thinking. I thought about how all the lines there never continued - how they only touched each other in jagged angles; and I wondered what would happen if someone took a line and shaped it so that the two ends touched each other in a

complete, even curve. This curving line would be an endless unit, a whole, indivisible and perfect.

I went over by the dead body and touched it, and its lines were still flexible; and I squatted down and began to pull off the arms, then the legs, then the head so that I could separate the main part into a long, bendable line. When I had done this I took one of the limp, linear legs and wrapped it tightly around the place where they joined so that they wouldn't come apart. Then I started forming it into an even curve where no part of the line was curved more than another. I measured it with the line of my arm, and as nearly as I could tell, every part of the curved line was the same distance from the other side. It was then a complete, curving frame all around. I sat down and held it. I would have to hold it until it was rigid and wouldn't bend out of shape.

I sat in the same position for a long, long time without moving, and still I continued to hold it. I sat there until I was no longer a child.

And then one day it became hard. I stood up with my creation and balanced it on the earth's line so that it stood up too, and I let go of it and stepped back to see what I had made. But something happened. It began to turn around and around. It moved smoothly and swiftly and glided farther and farther down the sloped line of the earth. I ran after it; but it always stayed ahead of me, turning faster and moving farther out of my reach.

I ran after it until I was old, and it passed out of my sight. The black line stretched ahead of me as far as I could see, dividing the white into earth and sky. I was afraid to keep going down because I didn't know how far the line would go or where it would finally end. I was afraid because I didn't know what had happened to the thing I had created or if the same thing would happen to me. I was too weak to walk back upward to the place where I had been when I was a child, and I stood there thinking about what I had done and how I had nothing to show. ●