# Otis Adelbert Kline

# Spawn of the Comet

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### **FOREWORD**

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It was called "Green's comet," after Sir George Green, the eminent English astronomer who discovered it. Long before it had reached the outer limits of the solar system it blazed with a light that marked it as no ordinary visitor from the interstellar voids.

Indeed, it appeared to have so large and compact a nucleus that scientists feared the entire solar system would be upset by its visit. But when it passed the orbits of the outer planets and relative perturbations were computed, it was found that despite its great size, its mass was not so formidable as to be alarming.

Because it did not develop a tail as it neared the sun, its immense coma—the nebulosity or head, surrounding the nucleus—was thought to consist of millions of small meteoroids, while what had previously been mistaken for the outside surface of a solid nucleus was spectrascopically proven to be the outer limit of an atmosphere quite like our own, but so filled with clouds of vapor that it was impossible to see the nucleus itself.

It was believed that the comet's atmosphere was warmed and the coma made incandescent by the friction of the meteoroids as they passed through its upper atmosphere, and also by the countless thousands of collisions which took place among them.

There was one thing, however, that caused considerable apprehension. Although the earth, so I am informed, once passed through the tail of a comet without injury,

astronomers had computed that on its return journey from its circuit of the sun the head of this comet would pass quite near the earth—might even collide with it.

In consequence, certain religious leaders became vociferous in their prophecies regarding the immediate end of the world with attendant fire, brimstone and such fearsome accessories. The tailless comet, surrounded by that bright, nebulous, translucent coma of huge dimensions, was an exceedingly Striking and brilliant spectacle. These prophets of destruction could nightly point to it and thereby gain many followers who garbed themselves in nightgowns and congregated on roof tops, singing psalms and waiting for the fiery chariot to come and taxi them up through the pearly gates.

But, strange to say, though on its return journey from the sun, the comet came within half a million miles of the earth —a very short distance as cosmic space is figured—and for a time looked larger and brighter than the full moon, there were no other signs of its immediate proximity than a few extra storms, earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, and a protracted and exceedingly brilliant meteoric shower.

It was that which followed this sudden and unexpected call of our bright visitor from the silent, star-strewn solitudes, which came so near to causing the end of the world, which, for the human race, amounts to the same thing.

And it is this calamity which I have set myself the task of chronicling in order that future generations may know the truth of the matter from at least one eyewitness.

RICHARD PERRY.

### I. — THREADS OF DEATH

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I WAS spending the week-end in the country with Sue.

To me, Dick Perry, one of the cave-dwelling desk slaves in Chicago's busy Loop, that was the height of bliss. Sue Davis, the eminent biologist and biochemist, was my fiancee. We were at the Davis country home.

The comet had come and gone, and the earth, as well as all earthly creatures, had settled down to its former more or less well-ordered existence.

It was Saturday forenoon—one of those drowsy, peaceful, pleasant mornings in late July so characteristic of the verdant Mississippi Valley. Sue and I had gone for a stroll on the farm, had crossed a field of nodding, fragrant clover, and had paused where a single huge hackberry tree cast its speckled shade over a small grass plot.

I was lying on my back in the grass and gazing dreamily up into the clear blue sky, while Sue, seated beside me, wove a garland of clover blossoms. Feeling poetic—I was but twenty-two and Sue nineteen—I began to compare the blue eyes with that of the heavens, and the spun gold of her hair with the sunbeams that danced down through the gently waving hackberry leaves, and to compose a verse suited to my mood. But there came a droning sound, louder than that made by the thousands of bees in the clover.

"The mail plane is coming in," said Sue. "Sit up, lazybones, and watch it land. The field is only a mile from here."