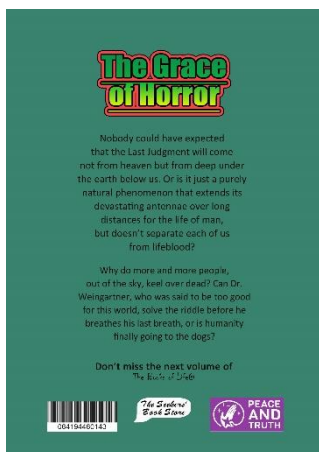


George M. Grow
Honey Fungus
Beast from the Underworld

The Final Days of Humankind



From the series
The Books of Life®



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Reading sample, page 5

Honey Fungus

First Act

First Picture

Time: presence. Place: downtown Concord, New Hampshire, Geologic Institute, office of Chip Kapinsky. In the background, there are two doors. The one on the left leads into an ante-room, and when it is open, a full waiting room becomes visible. On the right, a desk with PC and reams of papers. At the window, Kapinsky, fifty-nine-year-old. Propping himself on the desk, desperately shaking his head. He looks out of the window at snow-covered, befogged roofs.

SECRETARY (looks through the cracked door into the room). Professor! Here are two gents who came to see the doctor. Whoa, just thinking about it gives me a chill. I hope they take him away, the poor fellow. Shall I ask them in?

KAPINSKY. To see the doctor? Are the gents from the police, from the press, relatives? How often have I told you, you are to properly announce the visitors, you might as well let anybody in!

SECRETARY. I get the message.

KAPINSKY. Which message did you get, Miss Walker, who are you? A typist who thinks the stars would drop right out of the sky if she falls for a man.

SECRETARY. Don't forget that I'm just a human being too.

KAPINSKY. I want to forget it, but we have completely different worries. Ask the gentlemen in now!

SECRETARY. Gladly, since the

gentlemen are gentlemen.

KAPINSKY. What's that you say?

SECRETARY. You shall not have any lady visitors here. The walls are thin, I can't put up with it, I hear every word, it will be the end of me. (She sobs; submissively.)
Coffee?

KAPINSKY. I want nothing from you, why do you torment me?

SECRETARY. Because you insult me.

DUTY NURSE (among the audience, silently). Douche!

KAPINSKY (to the secretary).

Haven't you the slightest sense of decency? Our good man Weingartner has departed and you can only think of yourself. In truth, you are blackmailing me.

SECRETARY. No.

A VOICE FROM THE WAITING ROOM. Professor Kapinsky!

KAPINSKY (sees the two gents through the cracked door). Indeed, do come in! (The two men enter quickly the room.) With whom do I have the pleasure? (He shuts the door behind them.)

FIRST GENT (while he is looking around). There are different ways to get rich. Some get married, others inherit. Some actually earn their for-tune, and not a few turn to crime. We are responsible for the latter group. My name is Heaney, Inspector Heaney, and this is Sergeant Hammett. We are Criminal Investigators, and the cases we deal with are called murder.

KAPINSKY. Murder? Utterly out of the question. Dear Weingartner...

INSPECTOR. Where is he, then, the dear man?

KAPINSKY. Here, in the closet.

SERGEANT (opens the door to the

closet).

THE DOOR TO THE CLOSET (blocks the view into the chamber).

INSPECTOR (fans himself). Boo, he's been hanging there a while already, what's with the air conditioning?

KAPINSKY. It isn't working properly. (While opening the window.) He has certainly done this to himself.

INSPECTOR. I'd like to know what still works in this town at all. There are increasing deaths, times are hard enough, and then you say he did this to himself?

KAPINSKY. Exactly then, or not?

SERGEANT. Wrong, Professor. The better the times, the higher the suicide rate; the worse the times, the more they struggle. Inspector! The clothes rail he's hanging from! It is attached a lot lower than the dead man is tall.

INSPECTOR. Very strange. His feet are touching the floor.

SERGEANT. Either somebody helped him do it or he raised his legs on his own while breathing his last gasps.

INSPECTOR. Is that even technically feasible?

SERGEANT. With an iron will.

INSPECTOR. Quite the optimist, but yet still, we have to look into the matter. (To Kapinsky.) Did the deceased have any enemies, haters, enviers?

KAPINSKY. Weingartner? Difficult to imagine. I already told you that he was a good sort, the most decent man I have ever met. And who envies the good in a person, anyway?

INSPECTOR. You think he took his own life for decency's sake?

SERGEANT. This certainly would

imply that he committed something bad, anyway.

INSPECTOR (ransacking the desk). Well put together, Sergeant. (To Kapinsky.) Has he left a farewell note, any message?

KAPINSKY. Not that I know of. He was unmarried. No children, no wife, no romantic interests. All he cared about was his work, but he hadn't been active at the institute for a year. Two months ago, he dropped in and asked me if he could make use of the laboratory, but he never appeared after that, and now this.

INSPECTOR (pensively). No women, no children, just work in mind. Hem. The forensic people will arrive soon. If they don't find anything, we can close the case. You can imagine that we have got our hands full these days.

KAPINSKY. Inspector, aren't you going to take the poor fellow along with you?

INSPECTOR (walking off). That's up to the coroner. In two or three hours, you will be rid of him.

SERGEANT. Professor! (He and the inspector leave the office.)

KAPINSKY (alone; speaks into the closet). Weingartner, you stupid fool! You were too good for this world. That's what you get of it. (He takes a cigar from his breast pocket and looks for a light.) Where then are the matches? (He ransacks his pockets, then the drawers. In vain. He steps in front of the open closet.) Have you got a light, Weingartner? – No, no, in your case, I doubt you're in hell. Perhaps in your jacket pocket. (He disappears in the wardrobe.) Right, you don't smoke. (He comes

out.) Ahem. (His eyes look for the fire chief next to the stage.) Do you have a light, Chief?

FIRE CHIEF (moves, pats into the trousers pocket with a long, slow movement, searches and takes out a lighter, in turn, with a long, slow movement. He lights it.)

KAPINSKY (climbs off the stage, goes to the fire chief and lights up the cigar.) Many thanks, good work. (He appreciatingly slaps him on the shoulder, climbs back on stage, composes his white overalls, slouches in front of the closet and takes two puffs.) Weingartner, you stupid fool, how could you? "Carry your cross and it will make your life easier." My foot, now I have to deny everything. The reputation of the institute is at stake, and before the cock crows three times, I must betray you. God, what a profound word! I wish you a pleasant journey, Weingartner! Farewell, perhaps we will meet again. You were the best man who ever worked for me, adieu! (He waves good bye, shuts the door to the closet and leaves the office shaking his head. Overhead off.)

Second Picture

Kapinsky's Office

Overhead on. The same setting. Instead of the snow on the roofs which can be seen out the window, there is now glistening sunshine. The room, too is well lit. Weingartner at the window. He sees a plate of cookies on the desk, approaches it, eavesdrops and puts a piece quickly into his mouth, chews. Suddenly, the professor enters. Weingartner

swallows.

KAPINSKY. What a mess, that's all we needed. (To his assistant.) You know what happened, Weingartner? The dog carcass has contaminated the groundwater all the way from Fifth Street down to Ellington Road. Send out a warning to the affected households and inform the authorities!

WEINGARTNER. I wish you a good morning, Professor!

KAPINSKY (bustling). And what a good morning it is.

WEINGARTNER. How was your vacation, did you and the twins go sailing on Winnepesaukee Lake again this year? It's said to be an enchanting area.

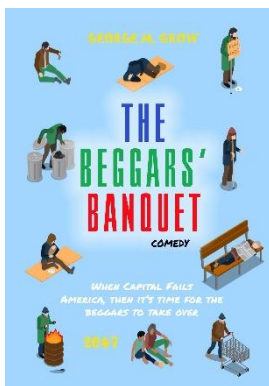
KAPINSKY. Indeed, Weingartner, but it loses all its charm if you spend day for day at the helm with my wife at the bow. And then this horrible calm. Four days at a stretch, and then the storm. I called, "Twins, lower the anchor!" They lowered it, but it wasn't attached. We twisted about madly, we lost the anchor, the rudder, the keel, only my wife remained. That's life, Weingartner; the children grow taller and the days grow shorter; your wife gets fatter and the times get leaner. Would you be so magnanimous as to answer this enquiry? (He shoves a piece of paper towards him.)

WEINGARTNER (casts an eye at the paper and puts it down). Well, that's settled, Professor. The sewer authorities report of serious silting in several places throughout the state. I've permitted myself to go through the geological

survey from the last quarter again
and came upon an odd, odd thing.

End of the reading

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