

(Excerpted from the story "It'll Go Bad Fast", from  
*Down Darkened Paths*, by Clyde Wolfe)

## It'll Go Bad Fast

Allen stepped into the kitchen and flicked on the lights. The bright fluorescent glow revealed an unwelcome sight. Centered atop the round table on a yellow platter, staring up with sightless eyes, was a human head.

Hairless, the decapitated head sat upright on the truncated stump of its neck; lying amid a congealed pool of its own sluggish blood. It was relatively fresh, the stench of rot not yet in evidence, though a single fly rummaged about an empty eye socket. The toothless jaws were agape, grayish tongue protruding slack like a freeze frame photo of a panting dog.

Icy fear raced through Allen's veins. Backing up against the wall, he looked around the kitchen wildly. All the windows appeared locked, the shades drawn to the sills, and the back door firmly bolted shut. No immediate threats. Just to be sure Allen checked each hasp; there were no shadowed lurkers hiding in the yard waiting to pounce when he pulled back a drape and peeked outside.

So much for a calm, relaxing Saturday morning. Work had been fraught with myriad tensions and unresolved logistical issues. There was talk of layoffs and restructuring. Of course this made the workers glare at the foreman with such venom and accusation, as if the fault were his. Allan had looked to the weekend as a chance to unwind and temporarily unshoulder the mountain of burdens thrust his way by upper management, and forget about the plant. This was the last thing he needed.

"Kelly! Kelly come in here!"

Soft footfalls of slippered feet heralded the arrival of

Allen's wife. "What is it, dear? I was just..."

Kelly's breath caught in her throat, a delicate hand covered the formed *O* of her pert lips. As her husband of these last eight years had done, her eyes swept the kitchen for signs of danger.

"Allen, I..." Kelly spun on her heel and started for the stairs. "Danny. Danny get down here right now!"

"Yeah, mom?"

Allen rushed to Kelly's side. "Now, Danny. Right now."

They hurried to the foot of the carpeted steps waiting for their son, Daniel Michael Robbins, to appear. Danny appeared, little four-year-old hands brushing away the last vestiges of crusty sleep.

As Danny descended within arm's length Kelly reached for her only child and gathered him up in a frantic embrace. Allen gave the living room and foyer a once over. Here too doors and windows were shut and shuttered.

As a family they entered the kitchen with the waiting head.

When Danny's gaze reached the gaping eyeholes he flipped around in his mother's embrace and hugged tightly, burying his head in the soft white cotton of her robe.

Allen shared a look with his wife.