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# He From Procyon

The Thought-Variant Novel

the greatest story yet written by

BY

NAT SCHACHNER

Astounding Stories

vol XIII, no. 2

April 1934

*He looked upon the world from his shining globe and saw intelligent life—or was it intelligent? Suppose he were to experiment——?*

He from Procyon saw the insignificant star glimmer redly in the depths of the universe. What it was that attracted his attention to it he did not know. There were hundreds of other stars in its immediate sector, far more brilliant, more brazen in their clangorous demands. Perhaps it was its very mediocrity that caught his fancy. So he plotted his course toward the modest little gleam.

The huge, many-faceted sphere swirled with magnetic currents. The swift light waves crisscrossing the universe felt the imperious pull, and swerved to concentrate their stores of energy photons on the angled plates. The impacts hurled the shell in the new direction, at a speed only slightly under that of light.

Alpha Centauri heaved into view, a dazzling blob against the immensities of space, and receded into the distance. Then there was nothingness, five years of it almost, while the dim red Sun grew from insignificance to respectable dimensions.

Time was an empty phrase—no one of his fellows on that vast satellite of Procyon had as yet dissolved into mortality. At stated periods, however, a certain restlessness seized the individual. The infinite universe beckoned, beckoned with the fascination of new systems, new worlds, new knowledge. So one by one they departed in their bubble shells, to return in centuries of years, content, or never to return at all. He was still doubtful. He was a bit tired of the tremendous suns he had visited, of their crude physical sameness. Life was what he was interested in, life informed with intelligence, with certain strange quirks and interesting oddities. Thus far, life had been a rare byproduct of scattered worlds, slimy, sluggish, not far removed from the mineral.

He was an invisible transparency of supermanlike form and dimensions. The basis of life on Procyon's satellite was silicon rather than carbon, silicon phosphorohydrates of complicated pattern. Only in certain lights, rich in ultra-violet emanations, did the glasslike plasm become visible reality to eyes accustomed to infra-violet spectra.

He yawned. Five years of nothingness and he was weary. The insignificant Sun was close by now. Planets swung around its redness, nine of them. For the moment he hesitated. Even the four larger ones were not of respectable size. It was hardly possible that they were the abodes of life. Life required spaciousness to be anything else but slime. He searched the heavens. The next sun was eight light years ahead. He did not wish to travel any farther. Either he found what he was seeking here or he would turn back to Procyon and the society of his fellows.

With indifferent weariness he decided between the two satellites that seemed to offer the greatest possibilities. One was enringed, a novel arrangement, but the other was larger, with a great red spot that might bear investigation. He yawned and plotted his course for the latter. Now whether it was the huge weariness that had assailed him, or one of the incredible divagations of chance, is unknown, but the fact remains that he made an error in his calculations.

As a result the faceted sphere slid past the bulk of Jupiter, crossed the untenanted orbit of Mars, and almost collided with a rushing speck before he was aware what had happened. He swerved and was tempted to continue. Again fate intervened. A smaller mote swung suddenly from behind the tiny disk, loomed alarmingly. At the speed of light, maneuvering requires vast spaces. It was too late to swing to the right or left, and the space between the two orbs was uncomfortably narrow.

He did the only thing that could be done. He cut the propulsive power of the light photons, swirled the magnetic current full force into the forward facet plates. The concentration in front acted as a brake, retarding the tremendous velocity until, with cushioned ease, the shell sank to within a few thousand miles of the whirling planet. A sudden whim seized him. He would land.

Thus it was that Earth received a visitation that was destined to be fraught with the most surprising consequences for humanity at large and certain individuals in particular.

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The sphere dropped slowly to the surface of a heaving ocean. It floated; a shimmering transparency in the ultra-violet radiations from the Sun. He anchored it by establishing magnetic contact with the core of the planet on which he had fortuitously arrived. Then he looked around.

To one side stretched the sea until the quick curvature of the globe showed a horizon line. On the other, however, dimly seen in the thick, strange atmosphere, was land.

There were forms and structures on the rim of the land fronting the sea. Not as large or graceful, naturally, as those on Procyon's satellite, but indubitably artificial. That meant life forms, denizens with at least a modicum of dim intelligence. He smiled; a rare thing for his godlike complacency.

The top of the sphere swung open. He rose. Around his middle ran a band of thin, transparent material. From it hung suspended tiny contrivances of curious shape. He manipulated one, a miniature replica of the great facet globe.

At once his shimmering form lofted through the opening, into the clear sunlight. Then he pressed another facet. The

impact of the concentrated photons drove him forward, straight for the city that sprawled with lancing spires along the shore, the city, in fact, of New York.

No one saw the swift-flying one from Procyon; no one could. A shimmer, a slight dazzle of sunshine, and that was all. Even when later, he landed and walked the crowded streets, he was practically invisible. Here and there some one with sharper sight, with greater sensitivity to ultra-violet radiations, complained of the shimmering, elusive obscurity, and thought uneasily of a necessary visit to an oculist. But the vast majority saw nothing and hurried about their futile businesses, unwitting that a new element was among them, a force that was to affect their lives in strange and unforeseen ways.

For days he traversed the circumscribed reaches of the earth, examining, testing, ferreting out this queer new life. He roamed the streets of London and Tokio, of Timbuctoo and Samarkand, he delved into the mines and walked the decks of great ocean liners, he penetrated the innermost privacies of the frozen igloos of the north, the black felt *yurts* of the Tartar steppes, ghettos and penthouse magnificences alike; but always New York drew him back.

Here was the very essence of the spawning excrescences that peopled this remote, inconspicuous planet. Here the scientist found ready at hand the greatest variety of genera and species, the thickest swarm of types. For days he examined and classified and studied. Then he was through.

He was a bit disappointed. Of course he had not anticipated life forms of similar intellect to those on his own satellite of Procyon. No one of the returning travelers had ever encountered such in all their wanderings. But there had been reports of scattered suns, here and there, where life had shown evidences of certain evolutionary possibilities, where glimmerings of intelligence were definitely perceivable.

Such was not the case on this little planet where accident had dropped him. Their capabilities, their achievements, were soon exhausted. A small race, small even in stature, not far removed from the slime; grasping vainly at the hem of knowledge and scientific achievement, thinking short thoughts, filled with pettiness and obscure longings, uttering barbarous noises to convey meanings to each other; arrogant, vain, contentious, bloodthirsty, envious.

As pernicious a race of vermin as ever infested the universe, he thought, not knowing that he was plagiarizing.

The innermost minds of mankind were an open book to him. On Procyon there was no need for speech. Thinking was a matter of synopsis, of physical and chemical alternations in linked chains of neurones. These transformations set up radiations as do all changes in energy states. His own mind was geared to receive the impacts, to interpret them properly.

Then an idea came to him. It was an impish idea, a perverse idea, such as seemed incongruous to the godlike he. Yet it might prove interesting, a veritable laboratory experiment in the lesser forms of life.

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It was night. He busied himself within the sphere, fashioning certain tiny instruments. Later he flew through the glimmer of moonlight toward the sleeping millions of New York.

Within half a dozen apartments, haphazardly chosen, half a dozen individuals, members of the human race, underwent identical procedures.

He worked deftly and with incredible skill. The sleeping subject plunged into the deeper sleep of hypnosis. A tiny machine was clamped onto the base of the skull. A slight buzzing, and four infinitely thin edges sank deep into the bone, to rise again with a section of skull. Undemeath, the gray convolutions of the brain palpitated with sleep-dreams.

He probed the whorls and grayish masses apart until he was behind the third ventricle of the brain. There he found what he wanted; the small reddish-gray, cone-shaped structure known as the pineal gland. Very carefully he pressed the crowding convolutions aside, shaping a tiny cavity around the conical body. Then he took one of the soft, round transparencies he had fashioned and inserted it into the space. From the ball dangled innumerable fine filaments. Two of these he sutured to the pineal gland, the others to all of the vital structures of the brain. The probe was withdrawn, the trepanned skull section carefully lowered into place, hair and all, and the application of a warming ray sealed the lines of cleavage.

The operation was over.

He stepped back, smiled, and drifted out into the night to select at random the next subject for his peculiar experiment.

There were six of them, four men and two women, alike unconscious of the incredible change that had come upon them in their sleep, unaware of the inducing cause. Only the last man held faint awareness, and he dismissed it as a dream until later events focused the incident sharply in his attention.

Outside, in the streets of New York, the roar of traffic grew heavy with the dawning of another workday, the millions

recommenced their appointed tasks. Everything seemed the same; the newspapers carried the same stodgy headlines; life flowed in normal channels. The visitor from Procyon was as though he had not been.

Yet within six heads, the mechanisms inexorably fulfilled their appointed tasks. Lives, fortunes, the very destinies of the world of mankind hung in the balance.

And faintly smiling, apart, he awaited the outcome of his strange experiment. The tiny machines were geared to run for one month of Earth time. That was ample, he felt. The urge to return to his own kind was strong within him; he did not wish to waste any longer period on this unimportant race of an unimportant speck in the universe.

## II.

As he was aroused, Charles Doolittle yawned, made sougning sounds with his lips, grunted, then burrowed his sparse, sandy hair deeper into the pillow. Something was roaring in his ears, and a strong, purposeful hand was shaking him by the shoulder.

The roaring had a familiar pattern.

“Get up, you lazy, good-for-nothing tramp; it’s after eight.”

Doolittle tried opening his eyes. All he could achieve was a blink. In the back of his drugged consciousness was the struggling thought that it was late; he was due at the bank at eight thirty sharp, and Wall Street was a long way from the Bronx.

The next shake rattled every tooth in his head. Not even hypnotic sleep could withstand such crude methods. He squirmed and forced himself to a sitting position. He rubbed his weak, nearsighted eyes.

His wife, sharer of his joys and sorrows for twenty-six years, stood before him, arms akimbo, bitter with compressed lips, the mole with the three long hairs on her chin wagging as she spoke. Her speech was to the point and in a familiar strain:

“You’re late now, Charles Doolittle, and you’ll be fired. You little no-count runt, why did I ever marry you? Me, what had the pick of a hundred men handsomer and richer than you. Look how I slaved and slaved all these years, and what thanks do I get? None! You lie there in bed like a lord, waiting, hoping, I’ll be bound, you’ll get fired. Well, let me tell you something; if you do, I’m through. I’ll go home to mother.”

Even in his unaccustomed daze, Doolittle remembered vaguely that Mrs. Doolittle’s mother was living with charitable, if reluctant relatives. His head ached, his brain was numb. The hypnotic sleep had found him a docile subject. But the fact did remain that he was late; something he had never been in twenty-eight years of bank clerking.

He blinked again, and looked at his virago of a wife. The mole with its three hairs annoyed him. Her endless pratings, too. Possibly it was the headache, possibly it was some other cause, but he did something he had never done before in all his happy married life. He talked back to his wife; more, he spoke to her disrespectfully:

“Go jump in the lake!”

His wife stared at him with strange, wide-open eyes, in mid-flight on a particularly meaty phrase. Then she turned from her frightened lord and master and walked out of the room. The next moment the outer door slammed.

Still trembling at his own temerity, but too drowsy to wonder, Doolittle fell back on the pillows and passed immediately into slumbrous snores.

It seemed to him that he had been asleep only a minute when the sharp insistent clamor of the doorbell awakened him. Yawning, groaning, sucking his gums, Doolittle dragged himself out of bed, scuffed his feet into slippers, wriggled into a bath robe, and shuffled toward the door.

He twisted the lock and found the door unlatched. He flung it open.

“I don’t want——” he began peevishly.

A big policeman pushed his way into the foyer, kicked the door closed behind him with his foot. In his hand he held an open notebook. His stern glance shifted from the thoroughly scared bank clerk to the little book.

“You Doolittle—Charles Doolittle?” There seemed menace in the way he said it.

“Y-yes,” the wearer of the name stammered.

The policeman consulted his book again. “Wife’s name Maria?”

Doolittle refocused his thoughts. He remembered now his strange defiance of the morning, her leaving the house.

He seized the third button on the blue coat in a panic of fear. “What happened to her? Maria—she hasn’t been——”

The policeman shut his book with a snap. “Naw! She was pulled out in time. She’s over at the hospital now, getting over it.”

“Pulled out! From where, what do you mean?”

“From the reservoir over on Jerome Avenue. Lucky the watchman saw her and fished her out with a pole.”

“Maria, jumped in the reservoir! But why——”

“She said you told her to do it!”



That was how it began—the first half-farcical, half-tragic result of the man from Procyon’s peculiar operations.

Alfred Jordan, holding down a minor job in the tax department, glowered at his opponent.

“I’m telling you, Joe,” he growled, “it’s the country’s only chance. Put in a good, strong man, and give him power, all of it.”

“G’wan!” said Joe. “What’d happen to the organization? What’d happen to our jobs?”

“To hell with our jobs!” Jordan declared violently. “The trouble with this country is, it has no guts. It can’t take it. Army discipline, that’s what it needs; some one to give ’em orders, tell ’em what to do.”

Joe stared at him curiously. Clancy, the chief clerk, was talking earnestly at his desk to Halloran, the powerful district leader.

“Army discipline,” Joe repeated, then laughed. “Sure, I forgot. Let me see. Wasn’t you a captain or something during the War? Swiveled a chair for the duration down in Washington—checking pup tents, wasn’t it?”

The dark blood rushed to Jordan’s naturally dark countenance. That inglorious record was a sore spot.

“Never mind about that,” he snapped. “I’m telling you—we need a man who knows how to run things, who isn’t afraid to tell ’em——”

“Like who, for instance?”

Alfred Jordan exhaled slowly. The overpowering, overweening dream of many sleepless nights. He hardly knew he had spoken. “Like me, for instance.”

A raucous laugh burst through his vision like a knife through wrapping paper.

“Well, Al, you always were a funny one, but this beats ’em all.”

Halloran, the district leader, looked over at them in annoyance. Clancy made a fluttering movement with his hand for quiet. But Jordan did not see; there was a red haze before his eyes. He shook a finger under Joe’s amused nose.

“You think I couldn’t do it; I’m not good enough, hey?”

“Sure, you are, Al!” Joe grinned. “Tell you what. Show ’em how good you are. There’s Halloran, the big shot, standin’ with Clancy. Go on over, an’ ask him for a better job. He’ll be glad to oblige.”

Jordan turned abruptly on his heel. “I will.”

Joe watched his fellow worker clump determinedly over to the sacrosanct desk. “The crazy loon!” he breathed. “He’s going to do it.”

Alfred Jordan barged into the secret political conversation without preliminaries. “I want to talk to you, Mr. Halloran,” he announced abruptly.

The district leader turned around. Clancy made choking sounds.

“Go ’way, Jordan. Can’t you see I’m busy?”

Halloran, to whom the remark had been addressed, stared slowly. His gaze turned rigid.

“Sure, er—Jordan. What can I do for you?”

Jordan plunged, not giving himself time to think. “I’m tired of this hole. This tax job you gave me isn’t worth a damn. There’s no money in it, for one thing; for another, it’s a clerk’s job. I’ve got ability, I know I have; I want you to do better for me.”

Clancy gasped. Al Jordan was nuts, talking to the district leader like that.

But Halloran stood there rigid, blank. Invisible radiations seemed to reach out, to envelop his mind in a web of entangling circumstances. He spoke slowly, like a somnambulist, like an automaton:

“Sure, Mr. Jordan, anything you say. I always thought you had the makings of something good in you. What job d’you want?”

Jordan was beyond fear, beyond surprise even. “I want,” he stated boldly, “the police commissionership.”

“All right, Mr. Jordan. I’ll do everything I can. There’s a meeting of the committee this evening. It’ll be a tough job, but I’ll make ’em do it. There’s lots o’ things owing to me.”

Clancy almost had a fit. He could not believe his ears. Yet the morning papers the following day carried huge

scareheads.

## SURPRISING SHAKE-UP IN POLICE DEPARTMENT

“Late last night Police Commissioner Mullen announced his resignation, giving poor health as the reason.

“It is significant, however, that it followed on a meeting of the county committee and a long, confidential phone conversation with the mayor. Though it was eleven o’clock at night when the resignation was placed in the mayor’s hands, at eleven ten his honor gave to the press the name of the new police commissioner.

“He is Alfred Jordan, an obscure clerk in the tax department, and a member of District Leader Halloran’s club. Political circles are buzzing with excitement. Who is Jordan? Why had he been given this important post?

“When approached for a statement, Halloran said that the change had long been contemplated; that there was too much crime and lawlessness in the city, that what was needed was an iron hand, strong discipline. Captain Alfred Jordan, by reason of his army experience, was the man best qualified for the difficult post.

“Investigation of Jordan’s army career, however, shows that——”

He from Procyon smiled under the protecting mantle of his invisibility. The comedy was slowly gathering momentum.

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Number three and number four knew each other. You see, Alison La Rue, nee Alice Jones, was a chorus girl; third from the left in the front row of the new Cary Vanities. Very personable and shapely she was, as indeed she had to be to have reached her present exalted position. Platinum-blond hair, big, baby-blue eyes with eyelashes carefully mascaraed, large, pouting lips red-curved in accordance with the mode, size thirty-six and other measurements to match, legs that were a treat to the tired business men in the front rows—in short, the very ideal of Miss America. Her slightly vacuous smile was regularly featured in the rotogravures, but her catty friends—of the female persuasion, of course—disrespectfully referred to her as “that dumb cluck.”

Number four knew her, not merely in the large general sense that she was known to her “public,” but in more intimate, personal ways. Backstage, dressing rooms, road house and—elsewhere.

She was talking to him now in exasperated tones. She was due to go on in the opening scene of the *matinée* performance—a great, scantily clad chrysanthemum, of which she was an outer petal. It lacked ten minutes of curtain time, and they were standing backstage in the cavernous theater.

“Listen to me, Tony!” Her voice was hard, compact. “I’m sick an’ tired o’ being made a fool of. I’m a good-natured girl, but you’re giving me the run-around. A girl can’t afford to waste her youth for nothing. You promised me that string of sparklers over two months now, and you’re as full of excuses as a fish is of water. I’m through. Go out ’n’ get ’em, or don’t come back. See?”

Anthony Marshall winced. In the first place he was forty-five, with an alarmingly protruding stomach and more than a hint of gout, the result of years of good living, drinking, and idling. In the second place, he had no money. His bank had enforced notice of that on him when his last check bounced back.

“I’m sorry about that, baby,” he pleaded. “I’ll get it for you soon. Just now I’m a bit short. My broker——”

“T’blazes with your broker,” she broke in rudely. “You heard me, and it goes. The sparklers, or we’re through.”

It was unfortunate of course that both of them had received similar operations. In the circumstances, the radiations of their respective wills neutralized each other and left them *in status quo*.

A man hurried by, agitated, intent on important things. It was Cary himself, the great producer. Marshall knew him slightly; it was his business to know every one.

“Hello, Cary!” he greeted.

The other merely grunted, detoured, was on his way again.

Anthony Marshall was a wit. He looked at the sullen beauty again and shouted after the retreating producer.

“Hi there, Cary! How about giving me a million dollars? Miss La Rue claims she can’t get along on less.”

The man stopped dead in his tracks. The noise of the approaching curtain was deafening. Something had gone wrong in the opening number that needed his urgent attention. Yet he turned back to Marshall, face set in a strange rigidity, impelled by invisible forces.

“I—I’m sorry, Marshall, I can’t give you that much. I’m not as rich as people think. This show put me in the red a lot.”

Anthony stared at him bitterly. The joke was being turned on him.

“Now let me see,” Cary continued intently, “I have around thirty-five thousand in the bank—I can give you that—my show holdings and houses could realize even now about a hundred and eighty thousand—maybe——”

Marshall cut him short. He must turn the joke back again on Cary somehow.

“O. K., old man,” he said genially. “Never mind the show business or the houses. Just write me out a check for thirty-five thou’ and we’ll call it quits.”

“Right away, Mr. Marshall,” Cary said, and took a folder check book from his inside pocket, unclipped his fountain pen, rested the book on a near-by table, and began to write.

“There it is,” he said at last, ripping the check from the stub, and handing it to Marshall.

Marshall took it gingerly, glanced at it with suspicious eyes. He expected to see staring him in the face some comical remarks.

He looked at it again. His hand trembled. It was a real, sure-enough check for thirty-five thousand drawn to the order of Anthony Marshall and signed—Lucian Cary.

He clutched the producer by the shoulder, spoke hoarsely: “What’s the joke?”

“Joke?” The man was surprised. “None at all. It’s what you asked for.”

“The check is good?”

“The check is good.”

Anthony looked at his wrist watch—twenty to three. The bank closed at three. Lucky it was only five blocks down Broadway. If only he could get it certified!

“Hey, big boy, where are you going?” Alison La Rue yelled after his rapidly moving back.

Marshall flung over his shoulder: “See you to-night, after the show. The necklace is practically yours.”

Then he was gone.

### III.

Alison La Rue did a lot of heavy thinking during the *matinée*. It was hard, unaccustomed work, so it was but natural that when the living chrysanthemum began to rotate rapidly to the music, one of the yellow petals was woefully out of step. For which she was duly and expertly excoriated by the stage manager. But she did not care; her mind was on other things.

Immediately following the performance, she waylaid Lucian Cary, put on her best kittenish smile. "Hello, Mr. Cary! I'd like to talk to you."

Cary had deep pouches under his eyes; he seemed to be in a state of high excitement, but at her request he turned rigid, said: "Of course, Miss La Rue."

"You were very good to Tony Marshall. I think you're a swell feller."

The coy remark had unexpected results. At the mention of Marshall's name, Cary's face swirled with blood until it looked as if he would have a stroke. "That dirty so and so!" he screamed. "He did me out of thirty-five thou'. I must have been drunk. And he got it certified, too, cleaned me out, before I woke up and tried to stop payment. Just wait till I see that guy."

Alison, or Alice, was astounded. Her scheme was being knocked into a cocked hat. She started to slink away.

"You wanted to speak to me, didn't you?"

Something urged her on then. "I'd like to get a better part, Mr. Cary. I've got the looks an' the figure, an' everything."

Cary's face was a set mask, the kind that was to become a familiar sight around New York and elsewhere very shortly. When he spoke it seemed as if it were some one else, something not a part of himself.

"Certainly, Miss La Rue. I've had my eye on you for a long time. Now let me see. I'm not satisfied with Gordon in the lead part; suppose you take off a week to rehearse it and I'll put you on in her place."

The stage, the theater, the earth itself seemed to rock and sway around her. She, in the leading rôle! In her wildest dreams she hadn't thought—the guy was crazy—hadn't even made a pass at her—but——

She looked at him sharply. "I can count on that?"

"The contract will be drawn to-morrow. I can't change my mind."

Therein he spoke the truth. She had clinched his continuing obedience by her last command. And, exactly one week later, electricians climbed the parquet in front of the theater, took out the bulbs that spelled the name of Cissie Gordon, and rearranged them to read "Alison La Rue."

And that same night, a bewildered audience saw the most atrocious performance that had ever disgraced a Broadway theater. Poor Alison cavorted around the stage in the belief that she was a wow; her voice was cracked and off key, her acting terrible, her coyness flat. In short, by the time the final curtain had fallen on a perspiring, enraged cast, and an equally enraged audience was pell-melling out of the theater, a smash hit had been converted into a total flop.

Alison La Rue sulked and sobbed in her tents. She hadn't learned the trick, the power that was in her. Had she commanded the audience to believe she was Sarah Bernhardt, Eleanor Duse, and Katherine Cornell rolled into one, they would have turned handsprings and gone out to proclaim it to a cockeyed world.

---

Craig Wentworth paced restlessly up and down the floor of his laboratory. Those few competent to judge knew him as an extraordinary physicist, who, with little or no backing, had opened new fields of thought.

Dr. Knopf watched his pacings with alert, anxious eyes. He did not like the feverish brittleness to his friend's speech, nor the content of it.

Wentworth whirled on him. His big body was taut, his eyes burned with strange fires.

"You don't believe a word I'm saying?" He was careful not to demand belief.

Dr. Knopf folded his hands judicially. He was an excellent neurologist and all-around medical practitioner.

"Well," he hesitated and weighed his words carefully, "it does sound a bit incredible. All those instances are——"

"Go over them again," Wentworth said eagerly, "and you'll see they're not mere coincidences." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Ten days ago a meek, henpecked bank clerk tells his wife to go jump in the lake. She does it, and declares afterward she felt something force her to obey."

Dr. Knopf shrugged. "We run up against many such cases in our practice," he murmured. "Sudden self-assertion on the

part of a habitually down-trodden worm so surprises the bully that it has a real hypnotic effect.”

“Granted!” Wentworth said impatiently. “Take the next, though. A petty politician, a nobody, forces Halloran, the big shot in this man’s town, to make him police commissioner. Same day, mind you, as item number one.”

The neurologist shrugged again. “Blackmail,” he suggested. “The little fellow had something on Halloran.”

“There were more. Take the case of Alison La Rue; a cheap chorus girl, of the dumb gold-digger type, forcing her way into the lead of a smash hit and closing it up the same night. Cary had the reputation of being a very shrewd producer.”

This time Dr. Knopf smiled. “Such instances are not rare in the history of the stage,” he pointed out. “I am told the lady in question had a certain amount of blond looks.”

“Sure!” Wentworth retorted sarcastically. “And so did Anthony Marshall who nicked the same smart showman to the tune of thirty-five thousand dollars. Cary put up a yell the next day for its return, claiming mental coercion—even started suit. Two days later the suit was quietly dropped.”

Dr. Knopf rose and moved thoughtfully past a row of motors. “Now that,” he remarked, “borders on the inexplicable. Knowing Broadway producers as I do, I’d say that any one who could get a dime out of them was using much more than mental coercion.”

“You refuse to be serious,” Wentworth said. “These are not coincidences. Every one of them occurred on the same day—October 26th. These were all instances I got out of the newspapers; the Lord knows if there are others which haven’t as yet broken into print.”

“You’re trying to insinuate,” Dr. Knopf remarked evenly, “that something happened to all of these persons simultaneously? Something that gave them the power to command whatever they desired, force other mortals not so gifted to do their biddings; a sort of Aladdin’s lamp, in other words.”

“Yes.” Wentworth’s tone was almost defiant.

Dr. Knopf went up to him, put his hand kindly on his shoulder.

“We’re dealing in miracles now, my boy. I may say without undue modesty that I am as familiar with the workings of the human mind, and all the mental phenomena lumped under the generic terms of hypnotism and telepathy, as any one in the field. I tell you as positively as I know how that there is nothing to your theory; that it is contrary to all the laws of psychology; that every example you have given me can be explained rationally and without recourse to supernatural effects.”

Wentworth took a deep breath, exhaled. “I didn’t tell you everything,” he said quietly. “For example, why I happened to go searching through the newspaper files for that particular date.”

Dr. Knopf cast him a quick glance. “I had thought of that,” he admitted. “I could give you a long Latin term for such a \_\_\_\_\_”

“Mania,” Wentworth finished for him. “No; I’m not insane. Suppose I were to tell you that I have that same power myself; that that was the reason I searched for other examples.”

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The doctor was on his feet instantly. “Craig, I’ve been thinking of running down to the Florida keys for a few weeks’ tarpon fishing. Finest sport in the world. Why not come along with me—I get crabby as hell if I’m alone.”

“So you do think it’s overwork and nerves—polite words, aren’t they?” Wentworth said calmly. “Well, I’m going to prove it—right here and now—on you!”

Dr. Knopf stared at him. “You’re serious about this?”

“I am,” Wentworth assured him. “I’m going to make you do something you don’t want to do; something that you will fight against doing with all your strength.”

The neurologist threw back his head and laughed. “Try making me stand on my head.”

“That would be a silly stunt and prove nothing. I’m going to compel you to disclose the most disgraceful episode in your life; the one that no doubt you have carefully kept in the most secret chambers of your mind.”

Dr. Knopf was amused, settled himself comfortably.

“Go ahead,” he invited.

“Tell me all about it,” Wentworth said in a quite casual voice.

The neurologist jerked his head, as if surprised. His thin, etched face took on set rigidity, his eyes stared blankly. The

perspiration beaded on his forehead. A tremendous inner struggle was taking place.

“You are right,” he said mechanically. “I thought my secret would die with me. It happened a long time ago, when I was much younger. I was an interne then; she was a nurse. I——”

“That’s enough,” Wentworth broke in sharply. “I don’t want to hear any more.”

Dr. Knopf swayed slightly, shook himself as if to break a spell. He sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry. “I said——”

“Nothing,” Wentworth assured him. “I stopped you in time.”

The neurologist sank back, trembling violently. He wiped his forehead. There was fear in his eyes.

“What are you—devil, or man?”

“I told you.”

“Something pulled at me, probed with inexorable pincers, forcing obedience in spite of all my struggles. I knew it was a test, yet I could not help myself.”

“The others have that same power; I am convinced of it.”

“It is a miracle,” the doctor said, “yet there must be some rational explanation. We are living in the twentieth century.”

“The explanation may be worse than the effect.”

“What do you mean?”

Wentworth told him of his queer vision of the night of October 25th, the drugged consciousness, the ache at the back of his head.

“He was no vision,” he concluded. “I am certain of that now. He did something to my brain, to the brains of others—God knows how many. Nor was he of this world. There was an air of remoteness, of detached amusement about him, as though he were a superscientist regarding me as an experimental guinea pig.”

“Hmmm!” said Dr. Knopf indistinctly. He was beyond skepticism now. “A being from another world, a scientist, a surgeon possibly. You say your head ached?”

“Horribly. In the back.”

The neurologist went quickly to his friend and forced him down into a chair. Expert fingers probed the skull, finding nothing. Grunting his impatience, Knopf pushed the black wavy hair apart, searching, afraid to find what he suspected.

A low gasp escaped him, a gasp compounded of horror and scientific eagerness. He had found it—the almost invisible line of ensealment of the trepanned square of skull.

“What is it?” Wentworth asked anxiously.

“Unbelievable!” The little doctor literally dragged the bigger man after him. “Come to my office, at once. I must see; I must see!”

Exactly two hours later he had seen. Wentworth had been subjected to every possible type of examination; he had been fluoroscoped, X-rayed, pushed, prodded, thumped, tested with delicate instruments attuned to every type of radiation.

The strange transparent ball attached to the pineal body showed opaque to X-Ray and fluoroscope; every time Wentworth exercised his will, a certain galvanometer, so delicate in its operations it could catch the whispers of cosmic rays themselves, reacted with barbaric violence.

The neurologist muttered and groaned to himself throughout the long proceeding. He bubbled and effervesced with excitement. “Wentworth,” he said earnestly, when it was finally over, “let me operate on you; remove that confounded ball. Let me find out its secret. Do you realize what it would mean? The greatest discovery of all time! The greatest \_\_\_\_\_”

“Stop it,” Wentworth said sharply, forgetting.

Dr. Knopf stopped in mid-flight. His will was like water.

“There’s the answer,” Craig said more carefully. “Don’t you realize what such a discovery would mean to the world? The slightest command would require instant obedience, no matter how thoughtless, no matter how terrible. Try to envision a world like that—how long would such a world last?”

Dr. Knopf thought reluctantly. “At least,” he implored, “we could limit the discovery to a few chosen people, of proved intelligence and high ideals. They would govern the world—bring about Utopia.”

Wentworth shook his head decisively. “Utopia would soon prove the worst kind of hell. Our choices would not be infallible. One unscrupulous person so equipped—and there would be no end to the harm done. Look what has already happened with the others. There is only one thing to do—watch for manifestations, find out who else possesses this power; do something to negate, destroy, their influence. We cannot allow this to proceed too far. If I thought it would help, I would kill myself, but I am needed. I am the only safeguard against those others, the irresponsible wielders of power.”

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As a matter of fact there was only one other thus far unmentioned. Her name was Margaret Simmons and she was a schoolteacher, already a bit weary of the eternal sameness of the schoolroom.

She was twenty-five and not exactly beautiful. Her nose and mouth were too generously sized for that. But there was a certain feeling in the broad, calm brow, in the masses of soft, brown hair low on the forehead, in the firm line of the chin, in the informed intelligence that permeated her features.

Men were glad to talk to her, that is, men of a certain standard of brains and culture. But their talk was invariably of the things of the mind, and not of the heart. She was weary of that, too. She would gladly have traded all her intelligence for the beauty of form of, say, Alison La Rue.

As yet of course she did not know of her new powers. She was singularly modest in her demands; she shrank innately from requirements on other people. Yet she had noticed, and marveled at, the sudden and implicit obedience to her lightest wish from the hitherto rather unruly children of her class.

“The darlings,” she thought. “Reason and patience have finally worked. They have come to understand.”

She did not know that outside, released from the surprising compulsion of her will, the little brats were the despair of the neighborhood.

Margaret walked slowly along West 72nd Street. She was on her way home. A man came rapidly out of an imposing apartment house. His clothes were baggy, and his stride rapid. His eyes literally flamed ahead. They caught hers, seemed to pass right through.

Her knees shook a bit. She knew suddenly, with awful clarity, that she wanted this man, wanted him badly, more than anything she had ever wanted in her whole hitherto uneventful life.

So intense was her sudden love that Craig Wentworth, who should have proved entirely immune, felt the shock of it pass like a wave through his brain. He stopped short, stared at this strange young woman who had affected him so peculiarly.

Margaret Simmons saw what she had done, felt the impact of that seemingly rude stare, and was lost in shame. With lowered eyes she walked quickly past, submerged herself in the crowd of afternoon pedestrians. She did not stop hurrying until she had reached the furnished room that was her home. She threw herself on the bed and sobbed.

Wentworth did not awake from the shock until it was too late. He started to walk fast after her, but she had already disappeared. He was positive that this casual passer-by was another of those who had been chosen for the strange experiment. “Good Lord!” he groaned. “How many more of them are there?”

Yet, somehow, his spirits were strangely lightened. There was no feeling of menace about this girl as there had been about the others. There was something warming about the impact of her personality.

He went on his way, evolving plans.

#### IV.

Alfred Jordan fingered the card in his hands. Neatly engraved on it was “Craig Wentworth”—nothing else. “I don’t know the man,” he said, “and I’m busy.”

The secretary was oddly ill at ease. “But,” he protested, “he said that——”

“I don’t care what he said; I won’t see him.”

“I rather think you will,” a quiet voice answered. Wentworth had come into the inner office unobserved.

The black blood stormed over the police commissioner’s face. “What the devil do you mean by forcing your way in like that? Get out and stay out! Hollis!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Show him out. Throw him out if he won’t go quietly.”

“You of course won’t do anything of the kind,” Wentworth observed equably.

The secretary wavered in despair between the clash of wills. There was nothing he could do, so he did the next best thing. He hurried from the room.

His chief, the police commissioner, stared after him in shocked wonder. It was the first time that any one had dared to disobey him.

The realization of his power had come upon him slowly. Dazed as he was by his sudden accession to high office, the wheels had been greased all the way. Veteran inspectors, boiling with anger at this political upstart, came into his presence and went away meek as lambs, mere yes-men. The newspapers had raised a great to-do, but not for long. Cynical reporters came, interviewed with previous tongue in cheek, went back to write glowing articles.

Jordan was gradually sensing his power, deliberately exerting his will. He invited the high and mighty managing editors themselves to a conference. The next day every metropolitan newspaper experienced a change of heart; Alfred Jordan was God’s own gift to the police situation—the greatest—blah—blah——

The mayor himself, waking up with a headache the day after the appointment, was aghast at himself. One interview, however, in which he had intended laying down the law, found him as meek and acquiescent as the rest.

As for the rank and file of the force, that is, every policeman who came under the personal impact of his will, they were obedient automatons.

He was fully aware by now of his peculiar gift. Just what it meant scientifically, he neither knew nor cared. He had a definite vision of himself as a second Mohammed, a new Alexander, a greater Mussolini or Hitler. His ambition vaulted. The police commissionership already seemed petty. Mayor was better, governor even; yes, the very presidency itself. And why stop there, he had already asked himself? Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the World! Dazzling fantasy!

Yet he was shrewd enough to realize the limitations of his influence. Already he had had evidence of it. Personal definite imposition of will was required. He must work slowly, step by step. But within those limits there had been no disobedience. Now——

“You are surprised, eh, Jordan?” said this most surprising intruder, seating himself calmly in the comfortable armchair next the official desk. “It’s the first time you’ve been crossed since the morning of October 26th.”

The police commissioner jumped to his feet, gripped the desk top hard with straining fingers.

“How did you know——”

“I know everything,” Wentworth told him. “I know for example that you slept more heavily than usual the night of the 25th, that you awoke with a strange headache, that, contrary to common report, you had nothing on Halloran. You asked for the job and you got it, even as you’ve demanded other things since, and achieved every one. Already you’re dreaming grandiose dreams.”

Jordan sank limply back into his chair. This was impossible! The man was uncanny. He forced himself to will, with gritted teeth.

“Go out; go out; go out!”

But the stranger sat on, wholly at ease.

“It doesn’t work,” he remarked. “You see, I am immune to your willing. I possess the same powers that you have.”

Jordan’s brain whirled. “You mean——” he gasped.



Wentworth leaned forward. "Exactly what I said. There are others, too. We are not the only ones."

"Who are they?" Jordan asked quickly.

Wentworth saw his blunder at once. "That," he said, "I won't tell you. But I have a proposition to make. Yours is a dangerous gift, one that eventually will spell disaster not only to ourselves as individuals, but to the world. Nature knew what she was doing when she withheld it from us. We are finite human beings, with a confused medley of emotions and desires. Not all of them are good; many are harmful. Give it up, Jordan, for your own good, for the good of the race. I agree to do the same; we shall persuade, use force if necessary, to compel the others."

He was pleading, desperately in earnest, trying to make this man see the light before it was too late.

Jordan sat and thought it over. The man was crazy to think he would give up such tremendous power. Let the fool do so for himself, if he desired; more, find ways of compelling him, even as he suggested. The thought of murder flitted casually through the mind of the police commissioner. But there were the others. Who were they?

Wentworth waited a decent interval. "Well," he asked.

"It sounds reasonable," Jordan admitted blandly. "Who are the others?"

Wentworth shook his head. "I'll tell you that," he said, "when you have agreed; when the others have agreed, too."

Jordan rose, shook hands cordially. "All right," he said. "Get the others' consent, and come back. I'll see you then."

Wentworth walked out of headquarters, knowing he had been defeated in the first move. More, he had blundered.

Jordan lifted the telephone. "Hello, Saunders! Man just went out, name of Craig Wentworth. Big fellow, baggy clothes, dark-haired, wearing a light-gray topcoat. Tail him; don't let him shake you an instant. Report frequently. Hop to it."

Alfred Jordan sat back, rubbed his hands. He was over his first shock. He even smiled.

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The smile, however, was erased that same evening, when Saunders called up the commissioner's new duplex apartment on Park Avenue—he had willed several millionaires during the past week to part with amounts totaling half a million.

The detective was panicky. "I lost him, chief. Honest, I was on the job every second. I don't know how he done it."

Jordan fairly screamed into the mouthpiece. "You lost him, you dumb cop! Didn't I tell you——"

"Sure you did, chief. I tailed him to his place on Fifty-ninth. It's some kind of a laboratory. I saw him go in, 'n lock the door. I spoke to the elevator boy; there was only one exit from the building, so I waited downstairs. Didn't want him to get wise to me. I hung around all afternoon, an' he didn't come down. I swear it. I went up again, and it was dark inside. I let myself in with a skeleton key; an' he was gone. The elevator boy swears he didn't take him down."

"You blithering fool!" Jordan yelled. "He knew you were tailing him; changed his clothes in the laboratory, fixed himself up a disguise, and walked out right under your ugly nose. You get out and find him—you understand? I don't care how long it takes you, but you've got to get him, and don't come back till you do."

Alfred Jordan was right. Craig Wentworth, regretting his impulsive trip to the police commissioner, had suspected that things were about to happen. So he kept a weather eye open and had no difficulty in spotting the man who dogged his trail.

Once in his laboratory, he called Dr. Knopf, explained the situation hurriedly. The neurologist clucked his tongue, and said:

"Be careful, Craig! A man like Jordan won't give up easily."

"I'm going to disappear," said Wentworth grimly, "and work under cover. You'll have to be my headquarters hereafter; I'll keep in touch with you."

"Be glad to help," Dr. Knopf said heartily. "And don't go making any more fool blunders like that."

Yet that was just what Wentworth did, that same evening.

He switched to an old pair of Overalls he found discarded in a closet, smudged his face with honest soot, dumped certain instruments and tools he needed into a battered old hand bag, hunched his shoulders, and slouched out past the cigar-decorated man who lounged in the entrance hall.

He entered Dr. Knopf's offices through the servants' entrance, changed to more fitting clothes. Then he hunted for a quiet room in the rows of brownstone houses on the side streets, where not too many questions are asked, found one that fitted his modest purse, and was soon installed. Not for a moment did the thought enter his head that he could easily command unlimited wealth by mere demand from any and sundry.

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It was about nine when Wentworth had finished. The evening was mild, and he thought the fresh air would be good after the turmoil of the day. The feeling that an extra-human instrument was lodged in his brain was uncomfortable, though there was no actual physical sensation. He seemed to hear it ticking, ticking away, interminably.

He walked briskly, absorbed, planning, when he was brought up short by a collision with a young woman hurrying in the opposite direction, equally absorbed.

“Oh!” she cried, and would have fallen if he had not put out a steadying hand.

Recognition was simultaneous. Margaret Simmons colored, and tried to escape. The touch of his hand awoke unaccustomed reactions.

Craig Wentworth grunted. Fate was playing right into his hands.

“You are the girl who passed me on Seventy-second this afternoon,” he said severely.

She tried vainly to extricate herself from his still-held grip.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” she said faintly. Her knees were weak. “Please let me go.”

He grinned suddenly, released his hold. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I would like to talk to you—somewhere where we wouldn’t be disturbed. Don’t misunderstand me; I have no ulterior designs. It is important—for both of us.”

She hesitated—proof positive to him of his former suspicions—and became suddenly reckless.

“Very well,” she said simply, not a hint of inner, seething emotions showing on her placid face. “There is a little restaurant, near Amsterdam, where at this hour we’ll be all alone.”

In the restaurant, securely ensconced in a private alcove, they busied themselves in silence with their coffee and pie. All the while, Craig issued mental order after order—small things, like picking up a certain spoon at a certain moment—with no ascertainable effect.

Therefore, when the plates had been pushed away, and cigarettes lighted, he had no hesitation in talking. Thus he did the very thing that had led to such untoward results with Jordan. Why he did it, he did not know, unless it was that the girl invited confidence; that she was so totally different from the newly appointed police commissioner.

He told her the story from beginning to end, withholding nothing. Margaret listened quietly, hardly interrupting. Slow pallor spread over her face as realization forced its way of the strange thing within her brain, of the terrible power she now possessed, together with this big man with the compelling eyes, with others of whom she had barely heard.

“So you see, Miss Simmons, the position we are in,” he concluded.

“My first name is Margaret,” she told him.

He smiled. “Quite right, Margaret. Mine is Craig,” and he continued: “It is a terrible responsibility. I have to watch myself carefully. I’m afraid even to think. The least desire on my part, and it is instantly gratified—that is, of course, if its fulfillment can be brought about by the person to whom it is addressed.”

The panic went slowly out of her. Womanlike, she addressed the problem to her own life.

She, to whom the whole world was now a gigantic oyster, from which she could extract whatever she pleased, had no thoughts of wealth, of adulation, of power over mortal lives. Love was the only thing she craved, with all a woman’s ardor. She could command love now, it was true, make slaves of all men by virtue of the power within her. All, that is, except the one man on whom her affections had irrevocably centered. He, of all the world, alone was immune to her will. There he sat, with composed features, conversing with her as with a comrade, but without a spark of warmth, of tenderness, in his voice.

What tremendous irony! What a cosmic jest! The taste of dust and ashes and sackcloth was in her mouth. She laughed bitterly, suddenly.

He looked up in surprise. He had been talking on and on, and she had not been listening.

“You’re quite right, Craig,” she said hurriedly. “Such godlike power is not for mortals. We would only destroy ourselves, and the world, with its exercise. It means nothing to me; I don’t want it. Take me, please, to your Dr. Knopf. I am willing to submit at once to his operation, to remove this fatal gift that has been thrust on us. Take me at once.”

Wentworth, a mere male, could not of course have followed the tortuous processes of her thought. He was surprised, rather than victorious.

“It isn’t as easy as all that,” he said, somewhat startled. “If there were only the two of us, the matter would be comparatively simple. But there are others. I know now of four; there may be more. We shall need our powers. Without

such aid we should be helpless against the others. Until we can fight this thing through, until we are certain every one at present so endowed has lost the gift, voluntarily or involuntarily, we must hold on. May I count on you?"

She extended her hand frankly. They shook hands. There was no need for words.

Within the week things began to happen at an increasingly accelerated pace. In the first place, each of the six chosen persons was in varying degrees aware of his new gift. And each was using it in accordance with the inherent laws of his own nature, as irrevocable as those of the Medes and the Persians.

He from Procyon moved invisibly over the terrestrial scene, watching. The idea, he thought, had been an excellent one.

Charles Doolittle faced his wife with fear and visions of retribution. But she was too weak to do anything but glare. And glaring from a reclining position in a hospital bed is a singularly ineffective procedure.

By the time she was back in their two-room apartment, and the glare was in good working order again, Charles, the meek, the henpecked, had by a number of incidents, discovered the secret of his success. The slightest argumentative word from Maria, and he started significantly:

“Go jump——”

That was sufficient. Maria remembered the feel of gallons of city water and subsided quickly. More, she began to thrill strangely to her new meekness—it was at once a novel and satisfactory sensation. Her husband took on added glories; love, sniffed at for years, once more flooded her heart.

She actually boasted of his strange control to the neighbors, and thus it came to the attention of Jordan, police commissioner of New York. For Jordan was searching diligently for all such instances.

The dragnet he had put out for Craig Wentworth had proved fruitless. The man seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth.

Saunders, the detective, was picked up three days later by an ambulance. He was in a state of collapse, footsore, blind with fatigue, starving, the mere shadow of a husky New York cop. The irascible command of the chief had been literally obeyed, as in the nature of things it must.

Alfred Jordan, not finding Wentworth, was compelled to hasten his plans. At the same time he conducted a relentless search for the others. Maria's boastings were gossiped of to the neighborhood cop, and ultimately reached the chief. By the end of the second week Jordan was informed as to five of the six. Only Margaret Simmons was unknown, and Wentworth, of course, was out of sight.

Meanwhile Alison La Rue had once more blossomed into stardom. The show reopened in two days—Cary was like a puppet—and this time the scattering audience, under the impact of her will, almost tore the house down with frantic delight. Friend told friend, second-line critics those of the first rank, who thereupon attended the next performance, and went out—conquered. She rode the crest high, wide, and handsome.

Of course, she accepted Anthony Marshall's string of diamonds, but she let it go at that. She had other admirers—and the gifts poured in. Not that Anthony was unduly heartbroken. He in turn for the first time tasted the delights of full and complete wallowing in every form of enjoyment. Acquaintances took to leaving everything but taxifare at home when they felt there was any chance of bumping into him, but it was useless. He made them write out checks—he always carried a supply of blanks with him—or sent them posthaste to their strong boxes and vaults.

The finest cook in the world worked for him; he had a yacht, a fleet of expensive cars, everything he laid eyes on and coveted. Only the gout remained from his former impecuniosity; that, and an increasingly sensitive stomach. These he could not will away.

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Jordan's coup was scheduled for the 20th of November. His lines were laid. The police force, twenty-five thousand strong, were so many automatons, to be galvanized into action by the sound of his voice. Throughout the city he had secret stores of arms; machine guns, rifles, ammunition, light artillery, even a few tanks. Private conversations with the officers of the forts around New York had resulted in prompt and under-cover removals.

The mayor of New York was his henchman, so was the governor. That meant the National Guard of the State. During the preparation period he made it his business to address every sort of gathering, the larger the better, American Legion posts, chambers of commerce, a football crowd at the stadium, a fight crowd in Madison Square Garden, binding them to his will.

“Damn that fellow, Wentworth!” he raged to his secretary, Hollis. Hollis was in his confidence. Jordan had to have some one he could talk to. “Not found yet?”

“No, chief. Every available detective is on the prowl for him; every man on a beat has his description. He must have left New York.”

The police commissioner paced back and forth with rapid, jerky steps, his black brows lowering.

“He didn’t leave,” he said positively. “I measured the guy pretty well when he was here. He’ll do his damndest to throw a monkey wrench into the works. That fool, Saunders!”

“What can he do?” asked Hollis.

Jordan threw up his hands. “Do? I wish I knew. That’s what makes me worried. He’s been too quiet. He’s waiting for me; he’s got something up his sleeve.”

“We move to-morrow, don’t we?”

“Yeah,” said Jordan heavily. “It’s too soon, but Wentworth’s hurried me. I’m afraid of him. It would have been easy if he weren’t around—or dead. Taken my time, made a tour of the country, spoken to millions o’ people, seen Congress, the cabinet, the supreme court, the president. By the time I’d have been through, they’d have forgotten there was such a thing as a constitution, and made me dictator. This way, I’ve got to hurry, use force, start a revolution. Not, y’understand, that I’m afraid of a little blood—I was a captain in the War—but it’s messy.”

“I think you overestimate this bird’s importance,” Hollis told him. “There are three others as well.”

“Them!” said Jordan contemptuously. “Don’t make me laugh. I could let ’em alone, and it wouldn’t mean anything. But to-night they all get picked up. I don’t take chances. Wentworth, though, is a fellow of different caliber. He knows things.”

Jordan was worried; that was certain. And there was good reason for his alarm.

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In the meantime, Craig Wentworth had not been idle. The past weeks had been filled with furious preparation. He hired a small shack in a tumble-down section of the Bronx, brought the few instruments he had salvaged from his laboratory there, added to them by discreet borrowings from Dr. Knopf, and worked savagely night and day, driving himself to the limit.

“If only Jordan takes a little longer,” he told Margaret, “we’ll be able to checkmate him. I need time.”

He had made it a regular habit to meet her after school for an hour or two, and dash right back to the Bronx, to plunge into his work until long past midnight.

Margaret was perforce happy at the daily sight of him, but she would have been very much more so if the conversation had not been wholly confined to Jordan, the menace, plans and speculations, without the slightest attempt at those tender intimacies that are so dear to a woman in love.

“What are these mysterious instruments you are working on?” she asked.

He smiled. “Read my mind and find out,” he challenged.

“I wish I could,” she answered wistfully, and changed the subject. “Aren’t you afraid of being picked up some day? The entire police force is looking for you.”

“I’ve fixed that. Only this morning a cop stopped me. ‘Say,’ says he, ‘you’re Wentworth!’ I laughed in his face. ‘I’m not,’ I said. He had his hand out to grab me. He stopped it halfway, let it drop. And I just kept on walking.”

“I wish it were all over, and we were all normal human beings again.” She sighed.

At nine o’clock that night, a squad of police broke into Doolittle’s apartment and yanked him away from his radio and evening newspaper. He was too surprised and too habitually respectful of law and order in the form of brass buttons to object. If Maria had been home, things might have been different, but she had been called over to her mother, who was a hypochondriac and was always dying.

Accordingly there was no difficulty about hauling him down to headquarters, to await disposition by Jordan. The steel door clanged on the bewildered little man with an ominous sound.

The second squad ran into trouble. They found Alison La Rue in her sybaritic penthouse. Jordan had expected some difficulty, so he had spoken to the squad for ten minutes before they went, to make sure his will would continue in effect. But he had overlooked the simplest law of his strange power.

“Come along, lady,” the lieutenant in charge said gruffly. “The commissioner wants to have a little talk with you.”

“Got a warrant?” asked Alison.

The policeman grinned. “Naw, don’t need any. Come along quietly, or your pretty face’ll get hurt.”

She wrapped her negligee closer around her and defied them. “I ain’t going.”

The five husky men paused uncertainly. The simple statement had been enough to counteract the recent impact of the commissioner's will.

The lieutenant realized his position was ticklish. No warrant and breaking into a private apartment spelled trouble, if the woman got herself a good lawyer.

"Now listen, lady," he pleaded.

"I won't," she retorted violently. "I got rights, and a lawyer. I ain't going and you can't make me."

The police, all husky five of them, wilted under the overlaying influence, became obedient automatons to her will. Had she then commanded them to kill each other forthwith, they would have done so under the compulsion.

With meek rigidity they filed out, leaving her staring. Being dumb, she had not as yet quite realized what she possessed. Which was mighty lucky for the world. She actually attributed all of her success to her brilliancy as an actress and to her irresistible feminine appeal.

At headquarters, Jordan first listened incredulously to his returning cohorts, then broke into a fury of vituperation. Now that they were once more under his personal influence, they were sheepish.

"I dunno how it happened," muttered the lieutenant, "but the moment that dame said she wouldn't go, it just seemed as if she was right about it."

Jordan controlled his raging temper in a hurry. He realized now the simple principle he had overlooked. He must be more careful in the future.

"I'm going with you," he said grimly.

Alison drew herself up haughtily at this second intrusion, but this time her protests were unavailing. Her will power was diffuse, weak, as against the grim, concentrated force of the commissioner. She went, and the cell door banged on her, too.

Anthony Marshall was nabbed at the home of one of his friends and, before he could protest, was gagged and blindfolded. Jordan was taking no chances on Tony's awareness of the situation.

"That'll hold them," the commissioner remarked with an air of satisfaction to Hollis as he personally locked the three great cell doors and pocketed the keys. "Put Moran in charge—he's stone-deaf and nearsighted. They won't be able to do a thing with him. He can feed them through the bars."

"What are you going to do with them?"

Jordan shrugged. "Ought to kill 'em off, I suppose. I will, if they make too much trouble. When things get set, though, I'll call in a good surgeon, to operate. Wentworth said something about it."

"And Wentworth?"

The commissioner's face darkened. "When I get hold of him——" he said slowly, and said no more. It was not necessary.

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All through the night the city was a hive of secret preparations. Ordinary good citizens went to bed unknowing what momentous changes were being prepared for their destinies, the destinies of the nation, the whole world in fact. Even Wentworth did not know. He was immersed in perfecting his apparatus. He did not dream that Jordan would act in such extreme haste.

The 20th of November dawned cold and clear. Early risers, ready to resume the day's monotonous round of duties, paused on front doorsteps and gasped.

The streets of New York were flowing rivers of grim, armed men. Policemen, National Guards, firemen, all with bright-blue arm bands, fully equipped with bayoneted rifles, ammunition belts; machine-gun squads, motorized artillery, light tanks, roared and thundered through the narrow thoroughfares on their way to the appointed rendezvous.

Every telephone exchange, cable office, railroad station, air field, radio station, every road, was policed, with strict orders to forbid all outgoing traffic, all outgoing messages. Jordan was taking no chances on the news of his mobilization getting abroad.

Wentworth was one of the early risers. He stepped unwitting down the brownstone stoop of his boarding house and was immediately shoved back by a raucous sergeant of police.

"Get back in and stay in!" the red-faced cop yelled. "No one allowed out to-day."

The street was alive with the noise of marching men, the rumble of artillery, converging on Central Park.

Wentworth was aghast. He experienced a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Blind fool that he was! Jordan had acted and caught him napping, unready. His apparatus was not yet complete. Jordan would strike, and win, before he had a chance to move.

“Get back, I told you!” The sergeant snatched out a revolver, leveled it at him threateningly.

Wentworth looked at the blustering policeman. The blue arm band shone in the sun, so did the blued steel of the revolver.

“You will let me pass,” he said coldly. “I am your superior; my will is your will.”

The sergeant moved back a step, pocketed his gun, turned rigid.

“Yes, sir,” he said tonelessly. “What are your commands?”

“Go to your home, and stay there until I give you further orders.”

“As you say, sir.”

The man saluted, and plunged into the heaving stream of men and materials, shouldering his way violently against the moving current.

It had worked. That meant the last imposing of will was the most effective. A wild hope darted through him. Suppose he were to appear boldly before the assembled troops, bind them to his loyalty rather than to Jordan's. A moment's reflection disabused him, however.

There he would necessarily run into Jordan. It would be a battle of conflicting wills, and he knew Jordan's was as determined as his. And Jordan's influence had sunk in by repeated commands. He, Wentworth, would be killed before he had a chance to make the men even waver.

The outlook was dark. Yet the first moment of despair soon passed. He must find Margaret, get hold of Dr. Knopf. Together they might find a way.

First, Margaret. He plunged into the seething horde of men, stopped each angry growl, each threatening move his way, by cold, curt commands. He went further. He ordered home those whose eye he could catch, and little groups of police dissociated themselves from the press, moved with rigid steps through their former comrades. A thin trickling of course that could have no appreciable effect on Jordan's scheme.

He found Margaret awake and pale. He did not interpret the glad little cry she gave at the sight of him, but hustled her out with hardly a word of explanation. Next he picked up Dr. Knopf.

Outside, Wentworth calmly commandeered an official car, told the uniformed chauffeur to step out, and got behind the wheel.

With the siren wide open, the heavy car roared through the crowded streets, heading for the Bronx. Men in uniform jumped for their lives, shouted angrily. Shots whizzed by, but their speed, and the wild confusion of their flight, saved them from harm. Once a battery of tanks blocked their way, but Wentworth leaned far out from his driver's seat, Margaret leaned out to the right, and shouted simultaneously:

“Pull aside; give us room to pass.”

The angry commander promptly obeyed; the tanks clambered up the curb onto the sidewalk, and the car whizzed through. In a little while they were free from the menace of Jordan's henchmen.

Hurry! Hurry! The thought hammered with insane repetition in Wentworth's brain. He must complete his apparatus, get it to the field of operations, before it was too late. And the sinking feeling grew on him again. It was too late!

They pulled up with a screaming of tortured brakes in front of the little shack that housed his equipment. Wentworth was out of the car before the wheels stopped rolling.

Inside, not stopping to doff his coat, he plunged furiously into work, simultaneously issuing staccato commands to Knopf and Margaret. They brought him tools, spliced wires with eager, untrained fingers, noted meter readings, did everything they could to help.

As they worked, Wentworth explained what the apparatus was, what he intended to do with it. Several times he was puzzled, asked Dr. Knopf for advice.

They raced against time, against the inevitable march of events. And still the machine was incomplete; vital parts, bits of vital theory even, as yet missing.

“We can’t stop the beginning of this awful revolution.” Wentworth groaned, “but with uninterrupted work all day and to-night, maybe we’ll get finished in time to call a halt before it gets out of hand.”

Uninterrupted work, a bare day and a night, to save the world from a greater menace than Attila the Hun, Ghengis Khan, Timur the Lame, or Napoleon had ever been. A bare day and a night! Modest demand!

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A belated policeman, on his way to a telephone exchange he should have contacted an hour before, saw the official car stop at the seemingly deserted one-story wooden structure, saw the two men and the girl get out. They did not see him, and thus were unable to influence his decisions. He recognized Wentworth at once from the broadcast description.

He did not stop. His orders were definite, inviolable, to proceed to the exchange. He had overslept. But immediately on arrival, he made connection with headquarters.

“I want to speak with the chief,” he said.

“Can’t,” said headquarters switchboard. “He’s left for the front.”

“I must talk to him,” he insisted.

“Don’t be a sap. I told you——”

The policeman had an inspiration. “O. K. Hollis there?”

“Yes.”

“Fine! Put him on.”

Hollis was impatient. “What in hell d’you want? I’m late for the chief now.”

“Listen, Mr. Hollis,” the officer’s voice was ingratiating. “When he hears the news, he won’t mind your being late. An’ put in a good word for me, too.”

“Spill it without so much chatter.”

“I found Wentworth’s hideout.”

“Wha-a-at?”

“I knew you’d be surprised,” said the policeman happily. “Here’s the dope——”



The mall in Central Park was in full panoply of war. Fifty thousand men surged in serried rows over the vast expanse. Twenty-five thousand police, ten thousand firemen, and fifteen thousand National Guards, wearing the blue band, presenting government rifles to the glistening sunlight.

Jordan stood on the raised platform, gratified. At his side were the mayor and governor, wan images of their former selves. His will was their will.

He raised his hand for silence. A hush, deeper than that of death, fell on the multitude. He spoke, projecting his commands through a loud-speaker system, so that the farthest trooper could hear and be impregnated with his will.

“Bluebands!” he orated. “I am your leader and you are my men.”

The troops roared their approval.

“The world has long waited for us!” Jordan shouted. “Fools and idiots have ruled it long enough. It is time for them to go. What this country needs, what the world needs, is a strong man, a dictator, who is ruthless and hard, and can impose his will. I am that man; I, Alfred Jordan.”

“Jordan, Jordan!” they yelled in unison, not knowing why, knowing only that they must.

“The President of the United States, Congress, all of them must go. They are weaklings. You, with myself at your head, will let nothing stand in our way. If there is opposition, if the enemy persuade deluded fools to bar your path, you will brush them aside; you will kill.

“We march on Washington at once. Company commanders, order your men to fall in. Take charge. Remember, my will in all things is your will. Repeat that.”

The terrible phrase parroted back in a thunder of sound. Like an insidious opiate it penetrated the most secret cells of the assemblage, making them mere tools fashioned to the hand of Jordan. He himself felt the powerful outpouring of radiant energy from his brain. It exalted him, made him feel like a god.

Battalion after battalion swung around in military precision, passed the speaker’s stand, saluted, and marched west through the park, toward Pennsylvania Station, on to destiny.

Jordan waited. When the last battalion was on the move, he would catch up in the armored car appropriated to his use.

His quick eye caught an eddy of movement through the last section of marching men, a wave that rippled toward him to the accompaniment of angry noises. It was Hollis, coming through on the run, hatless, panting.

“What’s the matter?” Jordan asked quickly. His first thought was that his prisoners had escaped.

“Wentworth!”

Jordan groaned. “You mean——”

“I know where he is. Patrolman Caffrey discovered him. It’s in the Bronx, on Southern Boulevard.”

The commissioner jerked forward. His eyes flamed. The last menace to his bid for world dominion would soon be in his hands.

“Quick!” He spoke rapidly. “Grab five squad cars, take a company of men. We’re going up there to nab him.”

“But, chief, you can’t go,” Hollis protested. “The Bluebands will be entraining in half an hour.”

Jordan swore. Hollis was right. Another limitation to the gift. Once out of his personal influence, there was no telling what the army might do in the face of opposition, of other forces. Perhaps some one else, unknown to him, also was in possession of the secret power.

“But, damn it!” he cried. “Unless I go along, they’ll never be able to take Wentworth. He knows what it’s all about.”

Then Hollis had a brilliant idea. “Why not shoot right down to the Tombs and talk to Marshall? I’m sure you can convince him to play along with you. It’ll be to his advantage. He can take care of Wentworth. Afterward you should be able to handle Marshall.”

Jordan’s face cleared at once. He shook his secretary’s hand enthusiastically.

“Hollis, you have brains. Hold a company to follow him after Wentworth. I’m on my way.”

Ten minutes later Jordan was in Anthony Marshall’s cell, talking earnestly.

The middle-aged clubman had been indignant, surprised, frightfully scared, all in turn. The sudden, unexplained arrest,

the summary incarceration, broke his spirit. He tried to talk to his lone jailer, to persuade him to let him out, but the man was deaf, couldn't even see the movement of his lips through the bars. Breakfast was silently thrust into the cell. He looked at the coarse food and shuddered. He did not eat it.

Jordan said: "I'm giving you a break, Marshall. Refuse, and it's the last thing you'll ever do on this earth."

Tony Marshall had no thought of refusing. "I'll do anything," he assented eagerly. "But what? I don't understand."

"I'll tell you." Jordan had decided on his story. "A scientist friend of mine stumbled on the secret of complete hypnotism. He experimented on me. It took. Then he tried it out in the street, on a few people, from a distance. You were one of them. Because it wasn't under laboratory conditions the power he gave you was much weaker than mine. You understand?"

Tony nodded weakly. With Jordan's fierce gaze bent upon him, and the calamitous situation he was in, it seemed quite probable.

Satisfied, Jordan continued: "My friend died. Certain things happened. More are on their way. I rounded up all the people he had experimented on, except one. That one, a chap named Craig Wentworth, got away. He knows the secret, is hunting for the others himself. He wants to operate on them, make permanent imbeciles of them for life, so he can be the only one in the field."

Marshall's gasp of horror was music.

"I've located him finally. I'd go for him myself, but other matters are waiting. Here's your chance, Marshall. Get him, bind, gag, and blindfold him, and bring him to me, and you're made. I'll appoint you my chief assistant; together we'll rule the country. If you don't——"

"I'll do it, Mr. Commissioner!" Tony cried eagerly.

"O.K. A company of soldiers will go with you. Now this is what you have to do."

Craig Wentworth was stumped. He stared at the almost complete bit of apparatus, frowning, his brow corrugated into innumerable tiny wrinkles.

"What's the matter, Craig?" Margaret asked anxiously.

He groaned. "The very last item, and I can't seem to make it click. Maybe you can help, Dr. Knopf. It's more a physiological problem than a physical."

It was the question of the last step; the hitching of the apparatus in some way to the queer, other-universe globule radiating away inside the brain.

Dr. Knopf thought deeply. "I wouldn't chance connecting it there. We know nothing about its constitution—disaster might be the result. But I do know about the pineal body, and I can guess why the globule was connected to that particular organ. If my theory is correct, you can achieve the same result by cutting your little machine in there."

Wentworth shouted: "We'll do it, then! That simplifies matters. Just a few more wires and we're through."

Margaret roused. "You mean you're going to insert that thing into your brain?"

"Not all of it. Just the wires. The apparatus itself will be strapped to my chest."

She was horrified. "That means an operation; danger. I won't have it, I tell you!" Her bosom heaved, she was panting.

Wentworth grinned down at her. "Dr. Knopf is a good doctor. He'll do it in a jiffy, like snatching out a tonsil. Don't worry. Let's get started."

But there was no further starting just then.

The door swung open with a crash. Wentworth whirled, saw the flood of bluebanded men pouring in like a resistless tide. In the split second left him, he recognized their leader. He was Anthony Marshall.

He opened his mouth to yell an order, a command, compelling these men under his will. It was too late.

The foremost were upon him, gun butts swinging. He tried to dodge, swerved, saw Knopf and Margaret go down under a huddle of men, cried "Stop!" and crashed headlong into a shower of explosive stars. The floor heaved once, and subsided into dead blackness.

Washington was amazed. As yet there was no panic. That would come later. The president and his cabinet were in session. With them was General Collins, the head of the American forces.

"I can't quite understand it, gentlemen," the president acknowledged. "It's incredible. A revolt against the United States to start just like that, without warning, without preliminaries, without rhyme or reason."

"Stranger things have happened all through history," said the secretary of state quietly. He turned to the chief of the secret service. "What information have you on it, Jones?"

"Little enough," he said. "Got a hundred men in New York and only one came through with a report, some twenty minutes ago. Claimed he had no warning. Early this morning the police and National Guard took possession, closed all avenues of escape. He managed finally to sneak through the lines into Westchester, and got to a phone. Says it seems to be headed by the police commissioner himself, a man named Alfred Jordan. Talk is that the mayor of the city and the governor of the State are backing him."

The president frowned. "It's unheard of. A city and a State defying the whole country. Sounds like comic opera. The mayor I don't know personally—he's just a time-serving politician. But the governor is a personal friend of mine, a man of intelligence. How did he get mixed up in this?"

"There's something in back of this," observed the secretary of state. "We'll have trouble, I'm afraid."

The general roused himself. "Nonsense. The president is right. It *is* comic opera. I've mobilized all the regular-army units in a radius of two hundred miles. They're entraining now. Within three hours I'll have twenty thousand men to meet the rebels."

"They have fifty thousand," the secretary of war interjected.

"My men are trained soldiers," the general said rather contemptuously. "They'll go through them like a hurricane." He looked at the map stretched out before him on the table. "They'll contact somewhere around Wilmington. I've already ordered General Harper there to take command. He's an excellent soldier."

The president's private telephone rang. He reached out and picked up the receiver.

"Yes; it's the president. Who? Who wants to talk to me? Alfred Jordan the First, Commander of the Bluebands. The man is crazy. What's that, he insists?"

The president's ordinarily kindly features set in grim hard lines. "Very well, put him on."

The secretary of state reached over and did a surprising thing. He unceremoniously jerked the receiver away from the president's ear, clapped it to his own. He stopped the angry exclamation of the startled chief executive with an upraised hand.

"Let me handle this call, please," he said quietly. "I think it's going to be dangerous to the man on the receiving end."

Jones, the secret-service man, acted quickly. He in turn tore the receiver away, lifted it.

"If it's danger, that's my job," he said. "Hello, hello—yes; this is the president talking. What do you want? Oh, you don't recognize the voice? Well, I have a bad cold."

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There was a long silence; evidently Jordan at the other end was saying things. The breathless assemblage could see the drops of perspiration start up on Jones' forehead, the strange rigidity that overcame his features.

"Yes, sir, Commander Jordan," he said finally. His voice was respectful. "I'll do that, at once, sir."

Jones turned and stared straight in front of him. "He wishes to talk to the president. He has an important message. I would strongly advise, sir, that you speak to him."

The president, his mind a trifle beclouded by the anxiety of the situation, had not noticed any untoward change in the head of the secret service. "All right," he said, "I'll talk to the madman."

The secretary of state caught his arm in time. "Don't you see, Mr. President," he cried, "how right I was? Look at Jones."

That focused attention. Jones was rigid, spoke almost like a wound-up mechanism.

"Nothing the matter with me. Commander Jordan is a great man. You must listen to him. Here!" He moved suddenly, thrust the receiver forcibly against the astounded president's ear, shouted hoarsely into the mouthpiece.

"Talk to him now, commander. He's on."

The secretary of state was on his feet like a flash and lunged. He caught Jones off balance, sent him crashing against the table. In the same movement, the secretary scooped up the receiver, ripped violently. The cord tore loose. The connection went dead.

Every one was on his feet now. There was hubbub, excitement. The secret-service chief righted himself, and his hand went to his pocket.

“Grab him!” shouted the secretary of state. “He’s going to shoot.”

General Collins pinioned his arms as the door guard rushed in. The gun was quickly removed, and Jones held panting, helpless, glaring.

“There’s the answer,” said the secretary of state, pointing to the renegade. “I knew there was something smelly about the whole revolt, about that telephone call. The man Jordan is a hypnotist, of supernormal powers. He has hypnotized a whole city into following him. He just did the same with Jones over the phone. He would have done the same with you, Mr. President, had you answered the call, and the sound of his voice reached you.”

The president acted decisively. “Remove Jones to a hospital, give him the best of care, but guard him closely, day and night. Have doctors and psychologists examine him, try to get him out of his state. Have them report to us at once.”

Within two hours the report was duly rendered, signed by the foremost medical men in Washington.

“We find,” it read, “that Emmet Jones is suffering from a strange form of induced hypnosis. Contrary to the ordinary states, he is absolutely normal in every particular—pulse, respiration, blood pressure, processes of thought and action, except in an expressed and fanatic belief in one Alfred Jordan and an avowed intention to kidnap or kill the President of the United States. All efforts to rid him of his induced complex have thus far been unavailing. Further reports will follow.”

But by the time the message was in the hands of the cabinet, it attracted only cursory attention. Other and far more alarming news had come through.

## VII.

Battle was joined a few miles north of Wilmington. At that point the troop trains commandeered by Jordan were compelled to halt. The first contingents of the regular army had torn up the tracks.

The assorted motley of Bluebands detained at once, drew up in a semblance of battle array. The tanks were hauled off flat cars, so was the motorized artillery.

The scouting party of regulars dropped a few shots among them to harass the unloading, and withdrew to the main body, resting behind a line of shallow, hastily dug trenches.

Jordan, his step firm, his ego impossibly inflated, entered an inclosed armored car. On the steel-plated top protruded a series of tiny cones. The tanks lined up on either side. In the rear the artillery swung into position, ammunition dumps were set up. Officers of the National Guard, artillery corps, plotted parabolas and arcs of fire.

A salvo was fired. It sailed high over the regulars' entrenchments. It took time to plot correction data. In the meantime the regulars returned the favor. The first burst smacked with earth-shattering concussion not a hundred yards in front. Flying clods and bits of shrapnel burst among them. Three men were killed outright, a number wounded.

The Bluebands were ready now. They responded with all guns. This time they were short, by three hundred yards. Almost on the heels of the detonations came the echoing answer. It came on with the roar of a thousand express trains. It crashed into the middle ranks, tearing great gaps in the compact masses.

"We're licked if we stay here," said Hollis. "Our artillery is no match for theirs."

Jordan heaved out of the car, in full sight of all his men.

"We attack at once!" he shouted. "We are stronger than the enemy; they can't stop us. There must be no retreat. Forward, on to victory!"

They cheered, not wildly, not enthusiastically, but with a strange, deadly monotone. Then they surged forward.

Jordan was in the car again. The line of tanks lumbered over the uneven terrain. The defending artillery lessened its range, smashed again and again into the attacking force. But the ranks closed up and went on, under driving compulsion. Terror was not in them, nothing but a hypnotic setness of purpose. Only death or crippling wounds could stop them.

At five hundred yards the entrenched infantry opened up, with concerted rifle blasts and the deadly rat-a-tat of machine guns. The field was reaped by an invisible scythe. Men slipped and staggered in the blood of their fellows, and went on. Whole companies were wiped out of existence; others took their places. A quarter of the tanks were disabled; the others rumbled on.

Then the trenches vomited forth men, line after line of them. A great cheer swept their ranks. They came forward on the double-quick, in open array. The sun spattered dazzlingly on leveled bayonets. The defending army was attacking.

"We'll never hold them, sir," said Hollis.

Jordan's face was exalted with passion. He was beyond doubt of his powers. He forked a tiny switch, and spoke in normal, ordinary, everyday tones.

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Outside, a volume of sound blasted from the tiny cones on the top of the car—sounds that were overpowering in their mightiness, yet clear as any bell, every syllable separate and distinct. It poured forth, met and muted the hellish concussion of noise inherent in gunfire and human shoutings. It overwhelmed the battle, seethed artillery itself down to a forgotten whisper. All the earth seemed to be waiting, listening in terrified silence.

"Soldiers of the United States army, stop; cease fighting! It is I who command you, your leader, Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the United States. Drop your arms at once, surrender; yield to my will in all things!"

The blast of sound penetrated to the last ranks, to the entrenched artillery.

The reaction was remarkable, instantaneous. The attacking forces paused almost in mid-stride, held rigid by indescribable forces. The weapons, deadly in intent, dropped from unresisting fingers. Their hands moved slowly up into the air, in token of surrender. Gunners, about to press electrical connections that would fire the belching monsters, paused bewildered, moved hands back to sides. The battle was over. At the moment of victory, the regular army had succumbed to a force they did not even recognize.

Alfred Jordan had won his first great victory. He had proved his powers on the largest scale. Already he envisaged himself the dictator of the Earth, already he sighed in anticipation, because, like Alexander, he would soon have no more worlds to conquer.

“Wonderful!” breathed Hollis, so excited he could hardly form syllables. “That loud-speaker system is——”

“A matter of being prepared. Rounded up every sound engineer in New York; gave them three days to evolve a super-sound magnifier. They did it.”

Within two hours the victorious Bluebands were in Washington; their original depleted forces augmented by the regular army that had been sent out to oppose them. Even a squadron of planes, fast bombers, could not zoom high enough to escape the tremendously enlarged sound of Jordan’s voice. Like so many harmless birds, they settled meekly to the ground, and their pilots turned into henchmen of the new dictator.

Washington was defenseless. The president and his cabinet fled hastily. So did members of Congress, and all officialdom. The city was in a state of terror. Refugees blocked all roads leading south. Those who could not escape cowered in their cellars, fearing the worst.

But Jordan, in spite of his megalomania, was no fool. He gave strict orders that there were to be no excesses; that discipline was to remain intact; that no inhabitants or their property were to be in any wise disturbed. He needed Washington whole for his purposes.

And, having the most unusual army in the world, one that was wholly and completely subservient to the will of its commander, there were no infractions.

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The events that shook the world on that fateful day of November 20th meant nothing to Charles Doolittle. No echoes of their shattering importance entered the monotony of his cell. His arrest and violent incarceration bewildered him. What had he done; what sin against society had he committed? He racked his brains for the answer. He asked the fumbling jailer who slid food between the bars and withdrew. But the man was stone-deaf. His sleep was uneasy, made terrible with nightmares involving Maria, drowned, bloated bodies and a sharp-bladed guillotine.

In the morning the cell next to him burst into furious life. It was a woman obviously, but a woman with a command of picturesque, vitriolic language that held Doolittle at once gasping and semi-admiring. Alison La Rue had reverted to Alice Jones, daughter of a longshoreman, and was telling the world about it.

Doolittle coughed hesitantly. It seemed to him that the woman was becoming a bit too descriptive in her delineations of her persecutors. The monologue ended abruptly.

“Who’s there?” she demanded quickly.

“Only Charles Doolittle,” he answered meekly.

“And who in blazes is Charles Doolittle?”

He coughed. “A criminal, I’m afraid.”

“Oh!” She was disgusted. The inmate of a cell would hardly be in a position to help her get out. Then feminine curiosity got the better of her.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing that I know of.”

“Then why are you here?”

“The police came and took me last night. Wouldn’t tell me why.”

“Sa-ay, that sounds like my story. Only they had to bring the commish to pull me in. There’s something screwy about this. I yell for my lawyer and nobody gives me a tumble. The guy what brings the tripe they call food can’t hear a thing. Don’t seem to be any one else in this jail. I’m going to yell again. I know my rights.”

The cavernous steel walls echoed with her screams, but frightening quiet followed close on the last rumble. No one came. She did not try it again. They talked in low, hushed tones—the little, inoffensive bank clerk and the gorgeous, preening creature in the next cell. As the shadows lengthened in the gloomy corridor, a certain intimacy had been established between them, these two ill-assorted companions in misfortune. The deaf, nearsighted jailer came on ghostly feet with their apology for a supper, withdrew like a wraith. This time they ate; hunger spread its mantle of illusion over the coarse fare. That night sleep was sound.

On the morning of the 21st, Jordan, installed in triumph in Washington, thought of his captives. He called in Hollis.

“Wire New York,” he ordered. “Have Moran bind and gag them thoroughly, and ship them here in a separate closed train. Impress on headquarters that in no circumstance is any one to approach them, except Moran. I’m sending the key by plane. Any word from Marshall?”

“No, chief.”

Jordan’s face darkened. “The double-crossing rat! Order a squad up to the Bronx to trail him. No; don’t do that. If Marshall’s actually double crossing, he’ll make them his puppets. I told him too damn much. Just as soon as I clear up things here, I’ll go to New York myself.”

It turned out to be unnecessary, however. New York was coming to Washington.

At ten o’clock on the morning of the 22nd, Moran entered the cell of Doolittle and proceeded to bind him expertly, thrusting a gag into terrified jaws.

Alison was harder. She bit and fought and scratched and screamed. Moran’s face, by the time he was finished, was scored with deep, raking slashes. A closed, windowless prison van backed to the gates; two silent, trussed figures were thrust inside. The police van sped to Pennsylvania Station where a special train was waiting. The prisoners were bundled into a private car, still in silence, the door locked from the inside by Moran, the only other occupant.

The train snorted several times and hummed through the tunnel. It devoured the long, shining rails to Washington. Moran sat and glared malevolently at his captives, nursing his wounded face.

This side of Wilmington, something happened. The torn-up tracks had been repaired, but some one had been careless. Several spikes were loose in their sockets, had wobbled more and more with each vibrating train.

As the special hit the weakened spot, two spikes snapped, the rails spread wide, and the fast-roaring train went plowing its way through still-bloodied fields. The engineer and fireman were instantly killed; the little group of Bluebands in the first car were ground into the very fabric of the telescoped shell.

The second car, containing Moran and the prisoners, dug itself into the ground, and burst into flames. There were several farmhouses some distance away, whose occupants, frightened away at the first mobilization of the opposing armies, had timidly returned the night before.

“Glory be!” said the grizzled farmer to his thin-lipped wife. “If it ain’t one thing, it’s another. Git some hot coffee an’ blankets ready. Maybe some un’s alive out there.”

He grabbed tools and rushed to the flaming wreck. The first car he saw at once was hopeless. The fire in the second was gathering headway. With pick and crowbar he smashed several windows of the overturned car. He crawled in, gasping in the hot atmosphere. Tongues of fire lashed out at him.

In one corner lay a man, his head lolling. The angle was such as could only mean a broken neck. Near where he stood, however, lay two figures, bundled and silent. Exerting all his strength, he dragged them out, went back for the third. It was too late; a blast of flame swept through the car as though it were a chimney, driving him back with singed beard.

His neighbor came running up, breathless with excitement. “Lord, Tom, sure is a mess! Save any one?”

Tom wiped his blackened face, coughed the smoke out of his lungs. “Only these two; others all dead, I reck’n.”

The neighbor gasped. “By crickety; they’re all trussed up.”

Tom stared. “So they be. I never noticed. Here, give a hand, Bill.”

He knelt at Alison’s side, whipped out a stout jackknife, and sawed at her bonds. Bill worked on Doolittle.

That evening the two escaped prisoners from the train wreck were able to take an interest in their surroundings once more. Fortunately their injuries were not severe; it had been the smoke that had knocked them out more than anything else. From the kind-hearted inhabitants of the farmhouse, who, incidentally, bowed to their slightest demands, they learned the story of the incredible events of the preceding two days, of Jordan and his spectacular coup against the country.

They reacted in different ways. Alison hated the man and at the same time he piqued her interest. A vague notion formulated in her mind; to proceed to Washington and pit her charms against the new dictator. If she could enmesh him with her fascinations, it would be revenge enough for the treatment he had meted out to her, and—wife of the dictator of the United States sounded sweet in her ears.

As for Doolittle, he had but one ruling thought. He wanted to get back to Maria and to his secure little niche in the bank and his petty circle of friends. The events of the past several days bewildered—more, they frightened him. But he realized that the way back to New York was blocked. Washington was close at hand, and connections might be easier to make from there. Accordingly it was determined that they would sleep at the farmhouse and proceed the following morning.

## VIII.

Craig Wentworth awoke with a splitting headache. The world whirled around with tremendous velocity, and his head went with it. At length the dizzying circle slowed down sufficiently for him to see that he was propped against the wall in a strange room, and his arms and legs felt terribly cramped. There was good reason for this—they were tightly bound—and also for the dry, stuffy sensation in his mouth. There was a gag rammed into it.

His head rolled weakly. On one side of him, stiff and silent, a huge welt across his forehead, was Dr. Knopf, propped at a precarious angle. On the other, Margaret Simmons, pale and drawn, was watching him with terrible anxiety. Both were bound, but not gagged.

Wentworth blinked and looked at the others in the room. Anthony Marshall sat in the only chair in the room, his legs crossed, and smoked a long cigarette delicately through a still longer holder. A dozen Bluebands were like so many statues along the walls, blank-staring, rifles grounded in front of them.

“Came out of it finally, Wentworth, eh?” Tony observed comfortably.

Wentworth made helpless motions with his head.

Margaret was about to burst out into passionate speech, but Wentworth sent a silent warning look across to her. She understood and held her tongue. It would not do to warn Marshall that she, too, was possessed of the power.

“All right, men,” said Marshall. “Go into the other room, close the door and wait for me. In no circumstances are you to do anything else, d’you understand?”

The Bluebands nodded silently and clumped out. Tony made sure the door was secure, and came over to Wentworth.

Margaret cried out: “Don’t hurt him!”

Knopf sat silent and rigid—a compound of hurt head and the will of Marshall.

Tony grinned and removed the gag from Wentworth’s mouth.

“The lady takes a deep interest in you, eh, Wentworth?”

Margaret went fiery red and said no more. Wentworth, manlike, was startled. Vague, not unpleasant, thoughts scurried through his mind, but the sight of Tony in front of him forced him back to the more vital issues. He spat the cloying taste of the wadding out of his mouth.

“I see,” he said bitterly, “you’ve joined up with Jordan.”

“Well,” Marshall looked at the ash on his cigarette with critical eye, “that’s better than being made into an imbecile, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

Tony stubbed out his cigarette, and lighted another before replying. “You ought to know. It was your idea in the first place.”

“Oh!” Wentworth saw it now. “So that’s what Jordan told you.”

Marshall leaned forward. “Isn’t it so?”

“A trifle distorted,” Wentworth told him calmly. “I simply realized that a few of us had become involved with a most dangerous power—a power that you can already see has led to disastrous consequences, and will lead to much worse before long. The operation I suggested, I have been assured by competent medical authority, is a simple one. It will remove the fatal gift without the slightest harm to all our normal functions. I shall submit to the operation voluntarily.”

Tony Marshall’s eyes glittered. “Listen to me, Wentworth.” His voice was hard. “I don’t intend being operated on, no matter how safe or simple it may be. In the first place I don’t like operations. In the second, this gift, or whatever it is, pleases me immensely. I lived by my wits long enough, and I’ve had enough of that. I like money, I like pretty girls, I like food and wine and fine clothes and all the luxuries that are now at my command. I’m not young any more, and I’m not that big enough of a fool to think that a beautiful girl will love me for myself alone. No, sir, just forget that part of it. I’m not giving up.”

“You’ve teamed up with Jordan,” said Craig. “You think he will share with you?”

Tony chuckled. “I don’t. He must take me for a sucker. Of course I pretended I’d play along with him. I had to; he had me at his mercy. But now—I have my own ideas.”

He leaned back in his chair, let the smoke dribble out of his mouth.



“I’ll make you an offer,” he said suddenly. “I can tell a straight chap when I see him. Play along with me, give me your word of honor you’ll obey me, and I’ll release you. Together we could wipe out Jordan, and take his place.”

Wentworth shook his head. “Sorry! The only way I’ll play will be to get rid of this menace from the world. That means \_\_\_\_\_”

Tony said regretfully: “Too bad! I’ll go ahead on my own, then. As for you, think it over. I’ll give you twenty-four hours. If you’re still stubborn, I’ll have to get rid of you.”

Wentworth looked at him with steady eyes. “At least release my two friends,” he said. “They are harmless.”

“No can do. They know too much. What goes for you, goes for them. So think hard.”

He got up, shoved the gag back in his prisoner’s mouth.

“I’ve got things to do. In the meantime, don’t try to escape. The troops have orders to shoot at the slightest movement. I have them under my personal control. And your gag will hold.”

He went quickly out of the room, and the Bluebands filed in, taking their stations with rigid faces. The door slammed.

Margaret whispered eagerly: “Shall I order them now?”

Wentworth shook his head. Marshall was still around, possibly. Dr. Knopf opened his eyes and groaned.

“Oh, my head! Where—where are we?”

Margaret said softly across Wentworth: “Take it easy, doctor. You’ll be all right soon.”

The Bluebands rested on the rifles, silent, blank-faced. The minutes crawled with leaden feet.

At last Wentworth thought it was safe to act. He nodded, once.

Margaret spoke: “Men,” she said sharply, “untie the three of us, at once.”

A wind ruffled through a dozen minds, cleansing them of old compulsions, overlaying new and therefore more powerful influences.

They jerked under the impact of her will, moved like automatons. Rifles clattered to the floor, clumsy fingers fumbled at knots. In a few minutes they were free, stamping to regain cramped circulation.

Margaret indicated the men, stiff at attention.

“What shall we do with them?”

“Go home!” commanded Wentworth. “Forget everything about this affair.”

As one, the dozen wheeled and clumped heavily out of the room.

The three followed. Marshall was nowhere in sight, and the Bluebands were streaming out of the front door. They were in the front of a vacant store.

“We’ve got to get back to the laboratory,” said Wentworth.

The street was deserted. All New York remained locked up in their houses, frightened, until the compelling broadcast forced them out into the open.

The street sign on the corner said Zerega Avenue. That meant they were about five miles away from the laboratory on Southern Boulevard.

Dr. Knopf groaned. “We’ll have to walk. And I have lumbago.”

“The trouble with doctors is that there are too many taxis in New York. Walk! It will do you good.”

They walked. On Tremont Avenue fortune favored them. An automobile parked at the curb had the ignition key in the lock. A minute later they were hurtling through ominously silent, deserted thoroughfares.

Wentworth dived into his laboratory with a hammering heart. He feared the worst; yet the realization struck him like a physical blow. The place had been seemingly left untouched, but the precious apparatus was gone. They searched frantically, overturning equipment in their mad haste, but there was no sign of it.

“Now what,” asked Dr. Knopf, “could Marshall have wanted with that? He didn’t know what it was for.”

“He’s no fool,” said Wentworth in bitter tones. “He knew I was working on something here, and the instrument surely looked mysterious enough.”

Margaret cried suddenly: "Suppose he uses it."

A shocked silence followed. Each tried to visualize what would happen.

Then Wentworth laughed shakily. "He wouldn't know what it was all about. Besides, it wasn't finished."

Dr. Knopf said coldly: "He has the power to command the advice and services of the greatest physicists and neurologists."

"We'll have to stop him before he gets to them, then," said Wentworth with determination.

"How about Jordan?" asked Margaret.

"Heaven only knows what's happened so far. It's getting complicated, this mess."

There was a radio in the corner. Wentworth tuned in, twisting the dial from station to station. It was dead.

"Come on!" he said. "We've got to find out things."

They went out into the silent street. An old-fashioned apartment house reared its plebeian head across the street. The shadows were lengthening; it was late.

They pounded up the worn stone steps, Wentworth in the lead. He paused at the first convenient door, knocked peremptorily. Feet shuffled inside, but the door remained closed.

"Open!" he shouted.

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Some one within, moved by blind compulsion, came to the door, fumbled at the chain. The door opened slowly, revealing the rigid face of a young slattern of a woman, dressed in a dirty kimono. They pushed in.

Margaret did the speaking. "Tell us what has happened to-day."

The woman spoke with an effort; her voice was trembling, and her reddened eyes showed traces of recent tears.

"It's been terrible," she said slowly. "Jim—he's my husband—he's a policeman—has been acting queer for days. This morning he got up early, picked up a rifle he came home with yesterday, and starts to go out. This was his day off. He had the strangest, queerest look, and he didn't even kiss me. I was scared. I talked to him; he didn't answer; just looked at me with a sort of blank face and walks out.

"I run to the window, and the street is full of men, all with guns, all marching. Then some one comes tearing through the street in a police car, shouting to every one to stay indoors all day; not to move out. Mr. Flynn, the neighbor next door—he's a night watchman—said he saw all the police with guns pouring into Penn Station. It was a miracle, he said, how he managed to get home. D'you know anything, lady?" She was crying now.

"No more than you do." Margaret patted her heaving shoulders.

"Nothing on the radio, either," she sobbed. "I left it open all day. They always tell you what's goin' on in the world, but to-day——"

The cabinet in the corner began to hum. The sound took on strength; the hum became a confused, blurred noise.

Wentworth made the distance in two long strides, twirled the dials to tune more sharply. The blur cleared into a voice. It was Jordan, broadcasting to the country on all networks from Washington.

"People of the United States," he said. "This is Alfred Jordan the First addressing you. You are all to listen to me and obey in all things. This country had been suffering from misrule long enough. It has been going from bad to worse; your leaders have been inefficient and criminally foolish. You need discipline, a strong hand over you, a man with vision and power. Then you will rise to your rightful place as a great nation, with food and plenty for every one, with the respect of the world beating on your shores.

"I am your new dictator, and my lightest word shall be your law. The overthrow of the present stupid government is complete. My army has met and defeated the governmental troops. The president and Congress have fled from my wrath. I am in full control; the seat of the government shall continue as before at Washington. You are to resume normal activities, always obedient to my will. You are to report at once the whereabouts of the fugitive president, of the officials of his deposed government——"

Wentworth shut the radio off angrily. "It's worse than I dared think. We'll have to——"

He broke off. The woman looked blank, obedient. But Dr. Knopf was set in a rigid mold.

"Jordan is a great man," he said monotonously. "I must obey him; I shall not——"

Margaret cried out, shrinking away from him.

Wentworth spoke rapidly: "Snap out of it, my friend. You take no orders from Jordan; you are free. Do you understand?"

Dr. Knopf shook his head confusedly. His eyes cleared. "I was under his control then," he said in awed tones.

"So is the whole nation," Wentworth groaned. "At least all who listened in. Jordan has brains, and knows how to use them. I should have thought of that broadcast stunt myself."

"Why not try it, Craig?" Margaret said timidly.

"Couldn't get the hook-up to be of any practical value," he explained. He started to the door. "We're going to Washington."

"And Marshall?"

He paused at the door, looked back. "I have an idea," he said slowly, "that gentleman will be there, too."

At the moment, however, Anthony Marshall had other fish to fry. The little instrument he had found interested him. Why had Craig Wentworth, whom Jordan had said was a physicist of parts, been working on it so feverishly at the time of his capture? Tony looked it over with shrewd eyes. He saw a flat, thin disk like a diaphragm. One side was slightly curved, as if it were a suction plate. Very fine filaments sprouted from the outer surface, dangling some three feet of wire.

He took it to Columbia, commanded the services of Verrill, head of the physics department. That obedient worthy examined it, unscrewed it delicately, peered into the complicated system of coils and batteries compactly within.

"I can't give you an opinion as to what it is without testing," he said finally. "If you will leave it——"

Tony left it and hurried back to the improvised prison. His prisoners were gone, the Bluebands as mysteriously had disappeared. He leaned against the door, panting, cursing himself for a fool. Somehow Wentworth must have worked the gag out of his mouth. After that, it was simple. He did not know of course that Margaret Simmons was also possessed of the gift.

Marshall realized with awful clarity that as long as the others knew of his secret, he was not safe. Jordan would not hesitate an instant to kill him off; as for Wentworth, the thought of the threatened operation turned him physically sick. Now he was free, and both of them would be gunning for him. Alison La Rue, too! One could never trust a woman, especially a woman of her type. He shuddered as though a cold blast had struck him. Almost he was ready to give up the fatal possession, if only he could buy peace, safety. But no operation—no!

He went wearily to his penthouse to think things out. It was night. His butler met him at the door.

"A man's been calling you all evening, sir. Sounded very much excited."

"What was his name?"

"Verrill, sir. Said it was most urgent you call him back."

Marshall's feet ached; his heart pumped alarmingly from the unaccustomed excitement and exertions of the past two days. His stomach was not so good, either.

"T'hell with him," he muttered drowsily. "I'm going to bed. Draw me a nice warm bath; plenty o' bath salts in it."

The next morning, around noon, he awoke. He felt a bit refreshed, and his courage had returned. He went to Columbia, found the physicist literally dancing with excitement.

"This instrument——" he spluttered.

"Well, what about it?" Marshall was still decidedly grumpy.

Verrill told him. He used easy, nontechnical language. Tony Marshall's eyes went wider and wider. His bewildered mind groped for implications. If only he could use it——

Verrill's voice acted like a cold douche.

"Unfortunately," he was saying, "the instrument is not complete. Just what activates it—in other words, what its motivating force is—I confess I don't know."

Marshall knew. He saw it all now. He told the physicist in guarded words, not revealing too much.

Verrill shook his head. "That's out of my line, of course. And I doubt, with only that to go on, if any one could help."

“Who would be the most likely?”

Verrill thought a moment. “Dr. Knopf, I’d say.”

Faint memory stirred in Tony. “A little man with a stubby black beard and high, bald forehead?”

“That’s the man. Do you know him?”

But Marshall had already snatched up the tiny disk with its dangling wires, crowded it into his pocket, and was out of the laboratory. Fool, he clamored to himself, Knopf then was the other man with Wentworth, the insignificant chap to whom he had scarcely given a second thought. He had had everything within his grasp and had permitted it to slide out.

Out in the street, once more normal with life, he paused uncertainly. What could he do now? He would go to Washington, he determined. There was Jordan; there was the heart of things.

He commandeered a taxi; drove to the Newark airport. A fast cabin plane was placed at his disposal by suddenly obsequious officials.

## IX.

By the 24th, Jordan had matters well in hand. His office in the White House was a maelstrom of excitement. Officials dashed in, clicked to attention, received snapped orders, saluted, and dashed out again. Telephones buzzed with unceasing clamor; telegraph instruments clicked under the flying fingers of skilled operators. The nation was completely enmeshed.

“Bring in the prisoners, Hollis,” said Jordan the First, resplendent in gold lace. It was an admiral’s full-dress uniform with modifications.

“Yes, sir.”

They came in quietly, hands bound behind backs. The President of the United States, the secretary of state, the secretary of war, General Collins, and the speaker of the house.

Jordan leaned back in his padded armchair, and surveyed them with something of a sneer. They returned his look with dignity.

“The former government of this country, eh?”

They said nothing.

“Well, you made a mess of it, and I, Jordan the First, have taken over. You were no good. Do you understand?”

A tremor ran over them. “We understand,” they spoke in unison, mechanically.

“That is fine!” said Jordan. “Now listen to me. From now on you take orders from me. I’m going to let you work; help in the divisions of government you used to handle. You’ll assist me; handle some of the detail work.”

“Thank you, sir.” They sounded for all the world like a chorus of yes-men. “We’ll do our best.”

“Take ’em out,” Jordan ordered. “And, oh, yes, remove their bonds. They aren’t necessary any more.”

He was pleased. Government had proved far more complicated than he had dreamed. The capture of these men in their hiding place had proved a lucky break. They could do the necessary jobs for him, subject, of course, to his final say-so. He rubbed his hands with a touch of acquired pompousness.

“A good job, eh, Hollis?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That broadcast idea of mine was smart. It calmed the country, stopped all rebellion. The people are my slaves now. They’ll follow me to hell. Now we’ll organize a bit and go after the rest of the world.” His eyes turned inward, as though seeing a vision. A beatific smile spread over his countenance.

“Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the World!”

How sweetly it rolled on the tongue!

Hollis was practical; that was why he was an excellent secretary. “How about the others?” he ventured.

Jordan came out of his dream. “Eh? What others?”

Hollis tapped his forehead significantly.

Jordan’s dark brow clouded.

“Two of ’em are dead.” The wreck had been duly reported, and the incineration of car No. 2. No rescues had been made, according to the report. “As for Marshall and Wentworth—what can they do now? What’s the last word?” he ended with an eagerness that belied his assumed carelessness.

“No news of Wentworth. Seems to have vanished out of sight. Marshall, according to Newark airport, took a plane, with their best pilot, and flew off, destination unknown.”

“Scared,” remarked Jordan. “Running for Canada, no doubt. I’ll get him there before long.”

A guard walked in stiff-leggedly, said in will-less tones: “Miss Alison La Rue to see you, excellency.”

Jordan was on his feet, gripping his desk, his face drained of blood. High heels made clatter through the doorway, and Alison, her round baby face wreathed in its best seductive smile, stood before his desk, alone. Doolittle was not with her.

“Hello, big boy! I got here finally, didn’t I?” She turned on a gaping Hollis. “Scram, fellow! Can’t you see I want to talk to your boss?”

Hollis went out.

“Now you listen to me, Jordan,” she shook a playful finger at the astounded dictator.

Somehow, he listened.

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Wentworth, Dr. Knopf, and Margaret Simmons were in hiding on the outskirts of Washington. Sleepless days followed sleepless nights. It was a difficult, almost an impossible, job. Wentworth was trying to reconstruct his instrument. He tried one supply store after another, seeking the necessary parts. Some were still missing; vital ones. Margaret went out daily, doing the shopping.

She walked slowly down the broad avenue. She was listless, weary. She had not slept for several days, but it was more than mere physical exhaustion. It was the maddening strain of close contact with the one man in all the world whom she loved, and whom alone she could not compel to love in return.

He was wrapped up in the instrument, feverish over the enchainment of the country, heedless of her except as a comrade, a companion in the work. Once, when in Marshall's power, there had been a gleam in his eyes, but it had quickly died.

She turned down Pennsylvania Avenue. The street was filled with hurrying government clerks, obedient to the strange, new government. How easy it would be to make one of them stop, become devoted to her. That tall young man with the blond hair, for instance. She toyed with the mad whim. He turned left, was entering a small, one-story building flush up against the imposing department of agriculture.

A man came around the corner from the opposite direction, stopped short, spoke to the tall young man. Margaret forgot her whim, born of tired, sapped strength, forgot her weariness. She shrank against the marble of the agriculture building, fearful of being noticed.

The two men conversed earnestly a minute, then the door opened, and they disappeared within. Margaret stopped a taxi, got in, heart fluttering. She must get back to their quarters at once.

The second man had been Anthony Marshall.

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When Margaret had finished her story, Dr. Knopf said quietly:

“Marshall has discovered your secret, Craig. That chap, from the description, is Hugh Lofting, the government's chief neurologist. I know him well. He's a good man. That building is his laboratory. Some one put Marshall on the right track, and Lofting will ferret out the last step within an hour.”

Craig Wentworth rose, went to the desk drawer, took out a revolver. His face was set, grim.

“What are you going to do?” Margaret asked in alarm.

“Get that instrument back.”

Dr. Knopf sighed and looked at his finger nails. “I'll go with you.”

It was over an hour before they got to Lofting's laboratory. Wentworth pushed the bell venomously.

A white-coated young man opened the door.

“Dr. Lofting? Sorry; he's particularly busy now. Left orders that he could see no one.”

Wentworth pushed his way past. “You're taking orders from me now. Keep quiet and tell me just what room he is in.”

The young assistant became instantly docile.

“Yes, sir. It's the third door to the left. There's some one in there with him. They've been together for over an hour.”

“I know,” said Wentworth grimly. “Come on, Knopf.”

Pistols in hand, they slid quietly down the corridor. The young man sat down in a chair in the entrance hall, immobile. At the third door they paused. It was closed, and a confused murmur of voices came from within. Wentworth put his ear to the door crack and listened. The voices grew stronger. Some one was saying:

“It sounds of course unbelievable. But if Verrill said so, there must be something to it. The hook-up is rather simple. I could arrange it right here. It wouldn't take over an hour all told.”

Marshall's voice filtered through, strained, anxious: “Means an operation, doesn't it?”

“Naturally. But a very minor one. No danger at all.”

A gusty sigh, a mumbling. “Operations, operations! All right, I’ll be game.”

Wentworth signaled to Dr. Knopf. He stepped back, put hand on knob, jerked quickly. The door crashed open and the two men plunged into the room, pistols steady.

A tall young man with a pleasant smile froze into alarmed rigidity. Marshall swerved, recognized the intruders, and cowered in sudden fear.

“Let me have that machine,” Wentworth demanded.

Moving as in a daze Dr. Lofting extended his hand, dropped the precious disk with its dangling wires into Wentworth’s outstretched fingers. For the moment Wentworth forgot Marshall. Dr. Knopf was covering him.

Tony saw the opportunity, grasped it. Fear made him move swiftly. “Out of my way!” he cried suddenly.

Dr. Knopf lowered his gun, side-stepped in complete will-lessness. Tony dashed out through the open door, ran down the long corridor, out into the safety of the street as fast as gouty legs and leaky heart could carry him. By the time Wentworth whirled for him, he was gone.

“Damn!” He smiled wryly. “I keep forgetting. It’s not your fault, Knopf.”

The doctor came out of it, chagrined. Then he brightened: “At any rate we have the instrument.”

“Yes. We’re going right back to the lab. As for you, Dr. Lofting,” he turned to that startled and eminent neurologist, “you will forget this entire transaction.”

The tall man nodded mechanically.

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Back in their tiny room on the outskirts, with Margaret acting as nurse and Dr. Knopf swathed in aseptic white bandages, the operation was performed. Wentworth lay still and cold on the improvised operating table. The odor of ether permeated the room. Keen knives flashed and dipped. Tiny wires were inserted, imbedded in special agar packs around the pineal body.

Knopf glared ferociously at the strange pulsing globule—his whole scientific being cried out to remove it, to analyze, to test—but the fate of Wentworth, of the world possibly, was in the way. And there was Margaret, white-lipped, holding herself steady as a proper nurse should by wholesale drains on reserve energy, praying with anguished inner tears for the safety of the man she loved. To Knopf it was just another operation.

At last it was over, the sutures completed, and Wentworth stirred weakly. Knopf had left the room to wash and dress. In the whirl of dizziness incident upon ether it seemed to Wentworth that he saw Margaret’s face close to his, brimming with tears, and a voice from far away, sobbing brokenly:

“My dear, my dear, awake! Don’t die; I love you.”

His brain stopped its ceaseless whirl; warmth flooded him; he opened his eyes. Margaret tried to step back, red flooding her shapely neck, but he caught weakly at her hand, and smiled contentedly. Then he went to sleep.

Protruding from the base of his skull were two fine wires that ran down to the small of his back. There they entered a broad band which carried them around to his chest and into the flat disk that lay cupped against the flesh.

---

Doolittle did nothing else for two days but gape around Washington. He forgot Maria, who may or may not have been weeping for her absent lord and master at home, he forgot his friends, he forgot even the sacrosanct bank, and reveled in an orgy of sight-seeing. All his life he had yearned to travel, he whose traveling had been confined to the diurnal subway trip from the Bronx to lower Manhattan.

It was a novel sensation. He ate in the most gaudy restaurants and waved aside the check with an air, he journeyed conscientiously to the top of the Washington Monument, he blinked owlishly at the weird planes and bold primary colors of the modernists at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, he tiptoed in awe through the echoing Congressional Halls—Congress was on permanent vacation; Jordan had no need of it—he even saw how money was made at the treasury. And he lived on the fat of the land without a penny in his pockets. That much of his influence he had learned from his association with the ex-chorus girl.

On the morning of the 25th he awoke in his luxurious suite at the Mayflower, and felt fed up with his wild, free life. The grim visage of Maria rose before him, softened and sentimentalized with the blurring effects of absence. Routine, habit, called him with irresistible force.

He arose, dressed in the new clothes he had demanded and obtained from Washington’s highest-class establishment, and walked out to the respectful bows of the entire staff. He was going home. The old ruts looked good to one weary of

traveling. It is a surprising commentary on the limitations of the human mind that the whole revolution in the affairs of the nation, even the supreme power that Doolittle himself possessed, meant less to his awareness than the thought of Maria and his accustomed orbit in the nature of things.

He taxied to the Union station and ordered drawing-room accommodations on the Congressional Limited. A heavy, broad-shouldered man saw the transaction, saw the passage of tickets without concomitant cash, and hurried into a booth to phone the dictator. He did not attempt an arrest himself.

Doolittle hummed a senseless little tune, waiting for train time. His humming was interrupted by the march of a dozen bluebanded soldiers, with Jordan at their head. The dictator's dark eyes glowered with grim satisfaction. Alison had betrayed the meek little bank clerk.

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Alison, clad in seductive negligee, cuddled against Jordan's shoulder. Her soft white hand rubbed his close-bristled cheek. She purred like a cat.

"Sugar baby," she said, "you're swell! I loved you even when you hurt poor little Alison. Ain't gonna do that any more, are you, big boy?"

Jordan was enmeshed. In the old days his female contacts had been casual and never rose to the type displayed by Alison. Her seductive wiles stirred him; he was just so much putty in her hands. Within ten minutes from her first intrusion into his office, he had been lost.

"Sucker!" she thought to herself and redoubled her efforts.

The man had the country in the hollow of his hands, and she had him. Beyond that she could not think. A dim thought of that silly old Bible story—what was it?—yeah—Samson and Delilah—floated through her mind and made it ache. Her thought processes were confined purely to feminine wiles and luxuriant living and did not extend to political power.

He kissed her hungrily. "I caught Doolittle this morning," he said.

"Yeah! I told you he was here. What are you going to do with him?"

He said lazily: "Kill him."

She jumped up, startled. She was not exactly bad-hearted. "You won't do that."

"Why not? I can't take any more chances. Look how you got away."

She ignored that. "But you mustn't. I—I kinda liked the little feller; he was so meek an' innocent."

He shook his head decisively. He was once more Jordan the First.

"I can't allow personal sympathies to stand in the way. We must get rid of all of them; all, that is"—he looked at her avidly—"except you. We shall rule the world, you and I, and these people are a menace to our power and continued safety. Doolittle must go; and as fast as we catch the others, they go, too."

Alison sighed and relaxed into his arms again. She had done her best for the poor little bank clerk. After all, Alf was right, and a girl had to look out for herself these days.

He stroked her hair. "That's better," he said. "Now suppose you get dressed for the review. It's scheduled for three o'clock."

She yawned. "What's the idea?"

"A mass showing of strength," he explained. "A hundred thousand troops will parade in battle formation. I'll address them, and broadcast to the entire nation. It will clinch my régime and at the same time show the rest of the world that I'm not to be trifled with." His eyes flashed darkly, he forgot the girl in the grandiose vision.

"That's the next step," he said. "The conquest of the world. I'm building now a fleet of transatlantic planes. Once they're finished——"

Alison was bored. She yawned again, showing white teeth. "Love me, big boy," she said.

A man burst into the private chamber. His eyes were bloodshot, his dress in disorder, his fat stomach heaving under the stress of panting exhalations.

Jordan shoved Alison aside, jumped to his feet. His right hand pawed at his pocket, came out clutching a flat automatic.

"Marshall!" he breathed unbelievably. "This time you won't escape, you double-crossing——"

Alison La Rue flung herself across his arm, diverted his aim. The bullet sped wild, crashed into ornate molding.



“Don’t be a fool, Alf!” she screamed. “Wait; he has something to tell.” She had an aversion to blood spilled in her presence. And Tony had started her off on the road to success.

Marshall swayed. His legs could hardly hold him. Fear haunted his eyes. “Don’t shoot!” he pleaded. “I’ve got news. We’re lost, all of us; unless we get together.”

Jordan flung the girl off his arm, held his gun ready for action. “I’ll give you a minute, Marshall. So talk fast. I’ve no use for double-crossers.”

“It—it’s Wentworth,” Tony managed to gasp.

Jordan stiffened to attention. Wentworth! The man he feared most, the man who had evaded him all along, yet who had done nothing so far!

“What about Wentworth?” he flung out impatiently.

“He’s here—in Washington. He has a machine——”

The words poured from Marshall, the perspiration from his forehead. He was deathly afraid. He told the story of the raid, playing it up as an escape while they were en route to Jordan, of his discovery of the machine and the opinions of Verrill and Lofting. He told of Wentworth’s sudden reappearance, of the recapture of the machine, of his own escape.

He did not tell how he wandered the streets of Washington all night, trying to figure out what he should do. Run away and forget it all, or play ball with either side. Wentworth he finally disposed of. The man was honest, and hence incorruptible. He would insist on his fool operation. Jordan was of his own ilk, a bit of a rogue, and hence might listen to reason this time.

“So you see,” he concluded, “that we’ve got to work together, or we’re all cooked.”

Cold panic clutched at Jordan’s heart. At the pinnacle of his power, at the moment of supreme success, at the opening of vast new vistas, to have this menace arise, this threat to everything he held. Rage swept through him, all the more furious for being so helpless. The others stared at him. He had the brains, they knew. Without him they were lost.

Jordan calmed down and set his mind to work. He called New York and spoke to Verrill; he called Lofting and listened to him. There was no thought now of killing Marshall. When he was through, his brow smoothed out a bit. Alison and Tony pounced on this crumb of hope with avidity.

“You’ve thought of something!” they cried in unison.

“Yes,” he admitted, “I’ve thought of something. We’ll have to get busy at once.”

He rang for Hollis. When that cat-footed secretary entered, he ordered:

“Bring Doolittle up here. You go along, Alison, to see he does no harm. Take the key.”

The review was a vast, glittering display. The great parade ground on the banks of the Potomac resounded with the tread of war-accountered battalions, the thundering plunge of interminable lines of tanks and heavy artillery. Each soldier, besides full marching pack, trench helmet, and bayoneted rifle, showed the distinctive blue band on the left arm. It was a tremendous sight, well calculated to throw fear and consternation into the hearts of alien nations. Unfortunately there were none represented.

The first overthrow had caused the cables to the home governments to hum with caustic reports from the diplomats stationed in Washington, but then, as they came under Jordan's personal influence, the reports changed to uncritical adulation. Alarmed, the governments hastily severed relations, left the befuddled representatives to look out for themselves, and prepared for war behind a vigorous blockade. Even the short-wave receiving sets had been dismantled; one small experience of a broadcast reception from the United States had been enough. Now, for the first time in history, all inter-European feuds were forgotten. The common enemy was Jordan.

The endless battalions marched past the reviewing stand, saluted with a thunder of cheers, and drew up at the farther end of the field in dress formation. On the reviewing stand a steel cupola had been erected. Within its comfortable dimensions rested the reviewing party. They were Jordan, Alison La Rue, Hollis, Marshall, and Doolittle.

They stared out at the parade through bullet-proofed glass. A cluster of microphones was grouped in one corner. From the dome of the cupola protruded the little sound-magnifying cones. Jordan was playing safe against all eventualities. The atmosphere was tense.

Alison said scornfully: "The show is almost over, and they ain't showed up. I don't think anything is going to happen."

Marshall mopped his baldish brow. "You don't know Wentworth. I'm scared." He turned suddenly on Doolittle. "Every one remember what he's to do," said Jordan grimly. "Did you hear me?"

The little man started and blinked nervously. "Y-yes, sir."

It was all very confusing, quite frightening, in fact. His reprieve from instant death, he had been told, depended on implicit obedience. Yet he was not quite certain in his mind what it was all about.

The parade was over; the great show was finished. The troops lined up to hearken to the words of their leader. The whole country was listening in, clinging to their radios, drawn like moths to their certain flaming destruction.

Jordan took a deep breath. For the first time that grim afternoon he smiled.

"Well," he remarked, "Wentworth did not show up. Either the machine didn't work, or he got cold feet."

He switched on the microphones. "Brave Bluebands, men and women of America," he orated. Then it happened.

Wentworth, Margaret, and Dr. Knopf were hidden in a little house about a mile up the Potomac. From there they could command a clear view of the parade ground. There, too, the atmosphere was tense.

"I hope it works," Margaret said anxiously. Her hands were clenched white with the strain of waiting.

"I'm sure of it," Wentworth returned positively. His face was drawn, but his eyes blazed with prospective consummation. "We figured it at about four times amplification, didn't we, Knopf?"

"About that."

"That's plenty. We'll not only blank out Jordan's influence, but override it four times. I'll make that army tum on him and bring him to us a prisoner."

"I'm afraid," the girl whispered.

"Of what?"

"I don't know. Of something going wrong. Suppose Marshall teamed up with him."

Wentworth smiled. "We'd still have the edge; two to one." He swept the far-off scene with powerful glasses. "Hello, they're starting!"

The tiny doll-like battalions swept across the field and lined up, waiting.

"Why don't we begin?" Dr. Knopf asked impatiently.

"I'm waiting for the commencement of Jordan's speech. It will be more dramatic to cut him off; to make him against his will confess his own sins."

Just then the air was filled with voluminous clarity of sound. Even here, a mile away, the sono-magnifiers carried the speaking voice.

“Brave Bluebands, men and women of America——”

Wentworth flipped a tiny switch. Then he concentrated, fiercely, intently, with all the will power at his command. Over and over he willed:

“Stop, Jordan, stop! I am more powerful than you. Obey my will.”

The little disk on his chest vibrated with the driving impact. It caught the radiations of the unspoken thoughts, stepped them up to four times normal power, and sent them out in vibratory waves to impinge directly on the wills of all within a radius of twenty-five miles.

“Stop, Jordan, stop! I am more powerful than you. Obey my will.”

The heavens, that had been filled with the thunderous sound of Jordan, stilled suddenly. The deathly silence had something physical about it. Jordan had ceased, broken off his speech by a will now superior to his own.

Margaret gave a glad little cry; Dr. Knopf’s ascetic face wreathed into a weary smile.

“We’ve won; we’ve won,” the girl cried.

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Within the steel cupola was consternation. Jordan, in full stride, felt an awful plucking at his mind. “Stop, stop!” cried an irresistible inner force. He broke off in the middle of a word. Huge globules of perspiration burst on his forehead. He turned helplessly to the others, mute appeal in his eyes. He could not speak.

Outside a cold wind sucked through the glittering ranks. Something seemed to lift from each man’s mind, something that had been a deadly incubus, a vampire that left only bloodless thoughts behind. Blueband stirred and looked uneasily at Blueband. An air of bewilderment engulfed them. What were they doing here, in martial array? It would take only a little word, an added impetus to the will, to start incalculable things in that great, suddenly released throng.

Alison and Doolittle were stricken dumb. They were not much good in an emergency.

It was Tony Marshall who rose to the occasion. “It’s Wentworth!” he cried feverishly. “Yell, damn you, every one of you. Yell: ‘Talk, Jordan, talk!’ ”

The others awoke from their daze, threw themselves into the task. Three brains poured out their influence in concerted waves, adding their strength to his helplessness. Currents eddied and lashed at each other in mortal combat in Jordan’s mind. His face was drawn and white from the terrific inner conflict. Again they yelled, willing themselves on.

The loud speakers crashed and boomed with the communal sound, flooded the little house up the Potomac with the ominous noise. It beat upon the three, beat with overriding force. Dr. Knopf succumbed at once to the influence. Margaret, after one anguished look, stared blankly, her own will crushed to earth.

Jordan’s voice, suddenly triumphant, beat and clamored through the air. “We are victorious!” he chanted. “Wentworth, wherever you are, obey my will.”

“Obey his will!” shouted the others, sweat pouring from every vein with the fury of their concentration.

The great army ceased their uneasy stirrings; minds went rigid, blank once more. Again they were automatons, harps to be played on by skillful fingers.

Wentworth reeled under the repeated blows on his consciousness. Invisible little hammers plunged with sickening thuds within his mind, beating out, hammering the iterated refrain: “Obey, obey!”

He felt himself slipping, going, a will-less mechanism. Despairing he turned for aid. There was none. Knopf of course was helpless. Margaret, too. She was staring straight in front, unconscious of Wentworth, of her surroundings. That part of Wentworth which was still free cursed himself for a fool. Why had he not foreseen? Why had he not made duplicate machines, given Margaret one? Jordan had outsmarted him. Somehow he had united all the others—four of them together—and they were fighting him, Craig Wentworth. His, Craig’s amplification, was a little less than four. He had miscalculated. That was why he was being defeated.

The little spark of freedom blazed brightly just an instant. Wentworth willed fiercely, with every atom of concentration he could muster against the implacable, heaven-filling sound:

“All of you, obey me, stop!”

It was a desperate, nerve-smashing effort.

Within the cupola four wills felt the inflowing tide. It engulfed, ripped their wills apart momentarily. Their voices faltered, were silent. Once again there was silence. Again the hundred thousand on parade, like puppets pulled this way and that by strings, moved uneasily.

But that last final surge of will had left Wentworth reeling, exhausted. He could not keep it up. He was drunk, drunk with fatigue. He lashed his mind to renewed efforts, he flogged his will unmercifully. It was no use. Toxic poisons clogged the cells of his brain; they refused their overloaded tasks, broke down. He wanted to lie down, to sleep. He staggered and swayed, and still he was victorious. No sound came through the waiting air.

It was the end, however. Jordan's iron will kept the four of them furiously shouting, even though no words came. Then Wentworth was through. He could not go on. The occupants of the cupola felt the sudden release, their voices rose triumphant.

"Wentworth, Wentworth, obey!"

Wentworth mumbled: "I obey!"

Vast weariness, cosmic indifference, engulfed him. Sleep, sleep, the blessedness of submission!

The two simple words flashed through their minds. Jordan's face was a fury of exultation. He had won!

"Where are you, Wentworth?"

It was all over. Wentworth answered in halting, blurred words: "In a house up the river. On the bank. About a mile."

"Good!" said Jordan. "Await my orders." He turned his words to the rigid troops, once more safe within his power.

"Colonel Harman," he snapped. "Proceed at once with your battalion up the river. Capture all occupants of house a mile up on the shore. Bring them back."

A long file of troops detached themselves, wheeled to barked commands, and marched with quick, simultaneous tread.

"We've got him now," Jordan chuckled and rubbed his hands. "There's nothing to stop me now."

"How about us?" Marshall interjected.

"Oh, sure, all of us together, of course," Jordan answered hastily. But his eyes narrowed. He was thinking hard.

Wentworth was watching the approach of the column of infantry with pain-blasted eyes. He was through, washed up. Jordan had beaten him. Now the whole world lay at his feet. He, Wentworth, had failed. His head ached terribly. The awful beating word smashed down with damning, steady force upon him:

"Obey! Obey!"

Jordan was taking no chances, was holding him to his will by continued reiteration.

The marching troops were closer now. The low, frosty sun sent steam up in thin vanishing wreaths from their lips; bayonets gleamed businesslike, with strangely reddened tips. Already he could see the distinctive arm bands.

His lackluster eyes glanced feebly around the bare room. Within a minute the head of the column would be upon him, would seize and gag him. The back of his mind, that tiny spark which was still free, still under the influence of his instrument, thought:

"Jordan will kill me, of course. I am the last obstacle in his path. But I don't care. Anything, anything is better than this torture."

What were those lines of Shelley?

Yet now despair itself is mild,  
Even as the winds and waters are;  
I could lie down like a tired child,  
And weep away the life of care  
Which I have borne and yet must bear,  
Till death like sleep might steal on me——

His wan eyes traveled slowly. They lighted on the rigid blank face of Dr. Knopf.

"Poor fellow," he thought. "I got him into this."

They traveled on. They brushed over Margaret, came to a halt. She was seated on a crude kitchen chair, her hands folded in her lap. Her face was drawn and pinched; she was suffering. Something fluttered within her eyes; some little ghost that tried to escape the vast compulsion.

A flood of warm pity surged through Wentworth. Poor girl, what would happen to her? She would—she would—of course—she would be killed, even as he, Craig Wentworth. Jordan was ruthless.

Something snapped within him. He knew now what he felt, what had lain latent throughout the surge of events, the feverish rush of the past several days. He loved Margaret Simmons! Fool, fool that he had been! She would die now, so would he. It was too late!

He stared out of the window at the inevitable approach. The thud of feet against earth came up even in the face of the damnable “Obey!” In half a minute it would be over.

A wave of rebellion swept over him. Frantically he thrust his will against the palsy sound. He shouted, he screamed, he clamored with all the force of his fagged-out brain against the engulfing influence. It was useless. The troops were outside already, a white-haired colonel barked a command.

“Obey!” shouted the air waves with insane glee.

Heavy-shod feet stamped into the room. Some one seized his arm. He stared with onrushing insanity, thrust all the fervor of his will into one last smashing attack, and collapsed.

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Jordan put down his glasses with a grin. “They’ve got him now,” he said. “But you keep it up. Don’t relax a minute until we have him here. He’s slippery, that fellow.”

“Obey! Obey!” they all said together, monotonously.

It was exhausting. Marshall was near collapse; Alison was shrill from much shouting. Doolittle repeated the words mechanically. He had been threatened with death if he did not persist.

“What is Maria doing now?” he wondered with his subconscious mind. The phantom of her grim, red visage rose before him. Even the mole with its three wagging black hairs on her chin. She spelled the old tight little circle of routine, of habits in accustomed grooves. There was safety, peace. What was he, Charles Doolittle, doing in these strange surroundings, harried, bullied, threatened?

A wave of meek rebellion swept over him. He looked around hurriedly. No one was watching him; each was concentrating, forcing his voice. He stopped the stupid chant and surrendered himself to a wallowing yearning for home and Maria.

At that very moment Craig Wentworth had shrieked his last attempt at defiance. The sono-amplifiers ceased suddenly. The fourfold will of the far-off man had beaten down the united efforts of the three.

Pressure lifted from Wentworth like a gasping diver hauled hastily to the surface from deep waters. The soldier who had gripped his arm, released him, stepped back uncertainly. The colonel brushed his forehead in bewilderment; there was confusion among the crowding men.

There was more confusion in the steel-built cupola.

Jordan staggered back, as if from a physical blow. He swerved, saw Doolittle—silent, rapt in ecstasy. In one stride he was at the little man’s side, towering.

“Shout, damn you, shout!”

His dark face was distorted with rage, his brain was reeling, his arm uplifted to strike.

Doolittle cowered, brought rudely back from his dreams. Something gushed. The meek, down-trodden little man was like a cornered rabbit with a terrier cutting off escape. Futilely, blindly, he fought back.

“I won’t, I won’t!” he screamed. “You can’t make me. I’ve had enough. Go on, kill me, I don’t care.”

Wentworth’s fuddled senses then cleared magically. It was now in effect five—his fourfold will plus the opposition of Doolittle—against three. He concentrated, forced his commands into roaring channels.

Margaret got up from her chair, a look of wide surprise on her face. Iron constricting bands around her brain lifted. She saw what was happening, spoke to the soldiers.

“March back to the parade ground. Seize Jordan. It is I who command you.” Her voice could not carry to the reviewing stand, but the troops were within sound.

With rigid mechanical movements the men moved out, formed ranks and went back.

Jordan’s arm fell to his side. His will was like water; he sat down with folded hands, waiting for Wentworth’s further orders. Alison, her face blown with red splotches, moaned and slipped to the ground. Marshall fainted. His heart was

pumping too hard. His breathing came stertorously.

Only Doolittle stood erect, triumphant. His will flowed soothingly along on the tide of Wentworth's radiated influence. Fear had left him.

It was quite dark when Craig Wentworth stepped to the microphones and sent his broadcast message of deliverance to the nation.

“You are all free now,” he said, and men, women, and children everywhere took deep breaths, looked at each other dazedly, and for the first time realized what strange compulsion they had been under. “Jordan is a prisoner, and so are all who were responsible for your hypnotic condition. Neither you nor the world at large will ever fully appreciate the terrible disaster that hung over you, the incalculable consequences that might have ensued from Jordan’s insane will. It is better so. Even now I am sending cables to the other nations of the Earth, apprising them of the overthrow of the menace to their security. No longer need they arm against a foe who would have destroyed them.

“As for you, so-called Bluebands, poor hypnotized instruments of a fanatic will, I release you. Disperse quietly to your homes, attend to your old normal duties. Special trains are waiting for your accommodation.

“To the nation of listeners, sleep with assurance to-night. By twelve midnight neither Jordan nor the others shall be of any further concern to you.”

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It was near midnight. The blue-white light beat fiercely from the overhead reflector like a spotlight on the immaculate porcelain of the table. A figure lay on it, swathed in white robes, a gag of soft-white gauze in its mouth. Its head was shaven. Black eyes stared upward, indomitable with driving hate, unwinking, trying desperately to force its will across.

Around the operating table were a group of figures. Dr. Knopf, dressed in surgeon’s white, his face masked, his hairy arms bare to the elbow. With him was another figure, similarly attired, Dr. Hugh Lofting. Assistants hovered solicitously, arranging terribly gleaming instruments.

From outside, through the ventilator, came the buzz of the city of Washington, awake from its nightmare, humming with excitement. Wentworth and Margaret watched with half-sorrowful eyes, turning to each other for comfort. Something passed between them, warm, understanding. His hand tightened on her arm. She sighed contentedly.

“Poor fellow, in a way I’m sorry for him. All his dreams smashed.”

“Better his, than that the world should go smash. A afraid, darling?”

She smiled at him bravely. “No. I’ll welcome the operation. I have what I wanted anyway.”

He squeezed her arm. “We’ll be the last to go on. Then we shall be sure it’s all over.”

They turned Jordan over, so the back of his head was exposed. A delicate galvanometer registered the driving radiations from the other-universe globules. The needle was pressing hard against the limiting knob.

“Too bad,” Knopf said regretfully to Lofting, “that Wentworth won’t let us remove the globules intact and analyze them. Think what it would mean.”

“I know.” Lofting nodded. “I’d give my right arm to find out how they work.”

“Orders are orders.” Knopf sighed and swabbed the base of the skull with iodine.

These men were pure scientists.

He lifted his scalpel for the first swift incision. A distant church chimed out the hour of twelve. The point of the scalpel pricked the taut skin.

“Dr. Knopf! Dr. Knopf!”

The voice of a white-jacketed assistant pierced the tense silence like a sword. Fortunately, the surgeon’s nerves were steel. He lifted the scalpel.

“Look at the galvanometer!”

All eyes turned. Outside, the last echo of the bells died on the air.

The needle, which a moment before was quivering against maximum charge, now rested quietly against the zero knob. It registered nothing.

Wentworth was at the machine in swift steps. “A wire must have loosened.”

But all his searchings disclosed nothing. All the connections were tight.

“What does it mean?” For the first time Knopf was agitated.

Wentworth’s face twisted with strange emotion. “Only one thing,” he said quietly. “The gift has been taken away from

us.”

“Nonsense!”

“I’ll prove it.” He stared steadily at Dr. Knopf. “I want you to put that scalpel down on the operating table. Obey me, it is my will.”

The neurologist looked at the scalpel in his hand, removed his mask, and looked at Wentworth.

“Was that a test?” he demanded.

“Yes.”

“Then you are right. The power has disappeared, evaporated. I feel under no compulsion to do what you desired.”

The long operating room was a babel of sound. Every one spoke at once and no one heard the other. Wentworth slipped out, brought the three bound captives into the room. Their frightened eyes searched his. One by one he released them, tested their wills on the galvanometer. It did not react. The terrible gift—the curse as it had turned out—had gone completely. Once more they were all normal everyday human beings.

The clamor grew. What did it mean? What had happened?

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Wentworth saw him then. A slight shimmering at first, a mere brighter concentration of light. Then, as it flowed into the area of the operating lamp’s blue-white glow, rich in ultra-violet radiations, the figure took form and shape.

“There he is!” Wentworth cried, with extended arm. “The being who appeared to me that first night.”

He from Procyon smiled a super-human smile. The comedy was over; the month of Earth time had expired. The globules next to the pineal gland were already absorbed in the surrounding tissues. His great transparent body dazzled the onlookers. An interne—more devout than the rest—fell to his knees. He from Procyon looked like a traditional archangel.

It had been a fairly interesting experiment. The scurrings of these insignificant creatures had provided a momentary amusement. Low grade, irrational, far down in the evolutionary scale. It was time he went back to Procyon, to the society of his fellows. He moved out of the beating illumination. His shining form faded, flowed into the nothingness from which it had seemed to come. He was gone!

Earth-born creatures stared with wide, incredulous eyes where the apparition had been. The sense of other-universe, of tremendous powers beyond their knowledge, weighed on Earthen brains. Margaret shuddered, and pressed close for comfort to Craig Wentworth.

[The end of *He From Procyon* by Nat Schachner]