

UNKNOWN

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TWENTY CENTS

FANTASY FICTION



DOUBLED and REDOUBLED . . . Malcolm Jameson

He was in a rut. Time after time he did the same thing, every day just like the last. In fact—it was the last, over and over again, his perfect day, and he couldn't stop living it over and over!



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SHUTTLE BOP Theodore Sturgeon

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Doubled and Redoubled

Malcolm Jameson

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He was in a rut, doing the same things every day—because every day was one day!

The very first thing that startled Jimmy Childers that extraordinary, repetitive June day was the alarm-clock going off. It shouldn't have gone off. He remembered distinctly setting it at "Silent" when he went to bed the night before, and thumbing his nose derisively at it. He was a big shot now; he could get down to the office, along with the Westchesterites, at a quarter of ten, not at nine, as heretofore.

He rose on an elbow and hurled a pillow at the jangling thing, then flopped back onto the pillow for a moment's luxurious retrospect.

Ah, what a day yesterday had been! The perfect day. The kind that happens only in fiction, or the third act of plays, when every problem is solved and every dream comes true all at once. He grinned happily. This time yesterday he had been a poor wage slave, a mere clerk; today he was head of a department. Until last evening the course of true love, as practiced by himself and Genevieve, had run anything but smoothly; this morning she was his bride-to-be. Twenty-four hours ago the name of Jimmy Childers was known only to a few hundred persons; all today's papers would carry his pictures and the commendations of the police and the mayor. Yesterday—

But why go on? Today was another day. Jimmy pulled himself together and got out of bed, making a slightly wry face as he did so. One only reached the utmost pinnacle once in his life; today, after yesterday, could only be anticlimactic. At ten he must hit the grit again. It would be a new kind of a grind, pitched on a higher level with higher and fresher ambitions, but a grind nevertheless. And so thinking, he reached for his clothes.

And that was when Jimmy Childers received jolts number two, three and so on! For the neatly wrapped packages delivered late yesterday afternoon from Livingston & Laird were not on the chair where he had placed them for the night. Nor was the nice, new pigskin wallet and the two hundred-odd dollars he had kept out as spending money from his race-track haul, anywhere to be seen. Even the empty jeweler's box that had contained Genevieve's ring was gone. Burglars!

Jimmy frowned in puzzlement. His door was spring-locked, but it was bolted, too. There was no transom, and the window was inaccessible from any other. It didn't make sense. He thought he would hardly make a row about it yet. Moreover, he was consoled by the thought that before going on his shopping spree yesterday, he had dropped by the bank and deposited a flat thousand. For reassurance, he slipped a hand into the inner pocket of his dangling coat and drew forth the little blue book.

The book was here, but the entry was not! Jimmy's eyes popped in unbelief. The last entry was May 15th, and for the usual ten dollars. Yet he remembered

clearly Mr. Kleib's pleasantries as he chalked up the one-grand deposit. Why, it was only yesterday!

He glanced up at the calendar that hung behind the door. Each night he crossed the current day off. Last night he had not crossed it, but encircled it in a triple circle of red—the day of days! He suddenly went a little sick at the stomach as the rectangle of black figures stared back at him. The fourteenth of June was neither crossed off nor encircled. Jimmy Childers sat down and scratched his head, bewildered and dazed. Had he dreamed all that he thought had happened? Could it be that today was the fourteenth, and not the day after? Trembling a little, he finished dressing.

For a time he pondered his strange feelings. He tried to account for the disappearance of the things he had bought, remembering that the boys rooming down the hall had a way of borrowing without always telling. They *might* have come in last evening while he was out. As to the loss of the wallet, a pick-pocket might have lifted that, and he tried to recall occasions when he had been crowded or jostled. He gave it up. There was only the old hag on Riverside Drive, who had held out a scrawny, clutching hand for alms. Surely she couldn't have been the thief! He smiled to recollect her fawning gratitude when in his exuberance he had unexpectedly given her a five-spot, and her mumbling as she tottered on her way.

No. None of it fitted. As a matter of fact, now that he was going into such details, he remembered distinctly getting home *after that*, and putting the wallet and empty ring box on his dresser, winding the clock, and the rest. He sighed deeply. It was all so screwy.

He walked briskly from the house. He had decided to say nothing about his loss to Mrs. Tankersley. Upon second thought he would wait until he got to his office, then he would ring up the police commissioner personally. Hadn't he told him only yesterday that if he ever needed anything just give him a buzz? Jimmy felt very grandiose with his new connections. He had completely conquered his jitters when he stopped at the tobacco stand on the corner.

"Gimme a pack," he said, "and extra matches."

The clerk handed the cigarettes over, and then in a low, confidential voice added, "I gotta hot one for you today—Swiss Rhapsody in the first at Aqueduct. She's sure fire, even if she's a long shot. The dope is straight from Eddie Kelly—"

"Wake up," laughed Jimmy Childers, "that was yesterday!" He started to add, "Don't you remember my dropping by here last night and handing you a 'C' for the tip?" but for some reason choked it. The fellow evidently didn't remember it, or

something. The situation was cockeyed again. So Jimmy said that much and stopped.

The clerk shook his head. "Not this nag. She hasn't been running."

"O. K.," said Childers, on a sudden impulse, and digging into his watch pocket he fished out four crumpled dollar bills. That was what he had to live on the rest of the week. "Two bucks—on the nose."

"You ain't making a mistake, pal," said the clerk.

The words startled Jimmy Childers more than anything else that had happened. Syllable for syllable the last exchange of sentences were identical with what had passed between them yesterday this time. Jimmy had the queer feeling, which comes over one at times, he was reliving something that had already happened. Hastily he pocketed his cigarettes and backed out of the place.

Downstairs in the subway station he snatched a paper and just made the crowded train, squeezing in the middle door into a solid mass of humanity. He was anxious to see whether his exploit in foiling the Midtown Bank robbery had made the first page or not, but it was not for several stations that he had the opportunity to open up his paper. Then he muttered savagely in dissatisfaction. The dealer had worked off yesterday's paper on him! He had read it all before—June 14th, PARIS FALLS. Bah!

"The young men of this generation have no manners whatever!" bleated a nagging, querulous voice behind him, and he felt a vicious dig at his ribs.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, automatically nudging away to give what room he could.

"People go around sticking their elbows in other people's eyes, trying to read sensational trash!"

"I'm very sorry, madam," reiterated Jimmy Childers, making still more room. He was looking down into the snapping eyes of an acid-faced old beldam, and the sight of her made chills run up and down his spine. This very incident had occurred to him in every detail only yesterday. He felt very queer. Should he drop off and see a doctor? No, he decided, it was that damn vivid dream that still hung on to him.

Then, when the flurry caused by the tart old woman's eruption had subsided, he stole a glance over the shoulders of his neighbors. Some were reading one paper and some another, but they all had one thing in common. They were yesterday's papers! And their readers seemed content!

"Hell's bells," ejaculated Childers, "I *am* nuts."

At Thirty-fourth Street he got no shock, for the mad stampede of the office-

bound herd is much the same, whatever the date. It was when he stepped into his own company's suite that fate biffed him squarely between the eyes again. Biff number one was that none of the other clerks took any special notice of him as he walked past the desks. The expected shower of congratulations did not materialize, nor for that matter, did the sour look of envy he expected to see on Miss Staunton's face. It was just like any other morning. It was just like yesterday morning, to be even more specific.

But he did not stop at his old desk in the outer office as he always had hitherto. He walked boldly on to the private office of the manager of the foreign department. It was not until he was within a pace of it that he halted in his stride, open-mouthed. The lettering on the door was not new gold-leaf at all, but the black paint that had always been there. It said simply, "Ernest Brown, Mgr."

He stared at it a moment, then turned and slowly made his way back to his old hangout in the clerk's offices. He hung up his hat and coat and sat down at the desk he had worked at for the past five years. Presently the office boy came bearing the trays of mail. Childers watched the deck of envelopes fall onto his blotter with tense anxiety. Somewhere in that batch of mail ought to be a test of his sanity. Or was it the reverse? He couldn't be sure. That damn dream had him so mixed up, he couldn't tell reality from pipe dream any more.

"I'm going to call my shots, from now on," he told himself. With a hand that was close to trembling he pulled a pad toward him and wrote down:

Acceptance and check for two hundred and fifty dollars in this morning's mail for a story I tossed off in my spare time and sent to the *Thursday Weekly*.

He turned the pad upside down and shot a cautious glance about the office. No one was paying him any attention. He ran through the envelopes. Yes, there it was. He almost tore the check as he snatched it out. Yes! The unexpected had happened, an impossible thing—his first effort at writing had been bought! He read the inclosed letter feverishly. Word for word it was the one in his dream. Now he knew that yesterday had not happened. For the *Weekly* wouldn't send out two checks for the same yarn. Would the rest of the day go the same way?

It did.

At nine thirty the messenger came and told him the boss wanted him at once. Jimmy Childers went with alacrity. For twenty-five minutes he had been sitting there, alternately chilled with fear and glowing with anticipation.

“Childers,” said the Old Man, “we’ve watched you for some time and we like your style. Beginning tomorrow you’ll have Mr. Brown’s job in the foreign department. The pay will only be two hundred, but remember that we are jumping you over a lot of other people. You may take the rest of today off.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Jimmy Childers with every appearance of calm acceptance of his just dues as a capable employee, but all the time queer tremors were playing hob with his inner workings. “But if it’s all the same, I’ll hang on as I am until noon at least. I would like to clean up my present desk before I leave it.”

“A very commendable spirit,” said the Old Man, cracking his cold face into the first smile he had ever let Childers see. That, too, had been in the dream. Childers was not sure whether he looked forward to the rest of the day with apprehension or what. It was a little disconcerting to know beforehand just how everything would turn out.

When he got back to his desk a puckish mood seized him.

“Oh, Miss Walters, will you take a letter, please.”

“A-hum,” he said, in his best executive manner, when she had settled beside him with her notebook, “To Mr. E. E. Frankenstein, Cylindrical Metal Castings—you know where—dear sir. In reply to your offer of this date of the position of stockmaster at your foundry, I beg to inform you that the job does not interest me and the salary you mention is ridiculous. Yours very truly—and so on and so on—the new title, you know.”

“Why, Mr. Childers,” exclaimed Miss Walters, “I didn’t know *they* were trying to get you—”

Childers cocked an eye at the clock. He had timed it nicely. The messenger was approaching with a telegram in his hand.

“Read that to me,” he said to the stenographer, with a lordly wave of the hand.

She tore the yellow envelope open and read the message aloud.

“How did you know?” she asked, wonder in her eyes.

“Hunch,” he said laconically, and lit a cigarette.

“By golly,” he told himself, “the dream is coming true, item by item.” In succession he rang up Genevieve and made a date for that night; and then his bookmaker and doubled his bet on Swiss Rhapsody. Then he fell to thinking about the affair at the Midland Bank and that took some of the glow off. Hell, that fellow with the machine gun didn’t miss him by much! Should he go through with it? He decided he would, for there were several details he had missed in the flurry of excitement in the dream. Moreover, he had pleasant memories of the fuss that was

made over him afterward, not forgetting the standing reward of one thousand dollars offered by the protective agency. If he were to be married, and now he was sure he would be, any extra cash was very welcome.

He took the *Weekly's* check and strolled out of the office. First he stopped by the haberdashers and spent a most pleasant hour selecting gay ties, a suit, hat and various other items. Then, leaving the delivery address, he made his way to the bank.

He had a very queer feeling as he went through the portals—that uncomfortable sensation of having done it all before. His upward glance at the clock and the fact that exactly 12:03 registered firmly in his memory was a part of it. But he nerved himself for the ordeal and went straight to his usual teller's window.

He had just shoved the money under the wicket and knew uneasily that goose pimples had risen all over him when the expected happened. A low, husky voice said almost in his ear:

“Stand as you are, bud. Keep your hands on that marble shelf and don't turn around. This is a stick-up.”

Then the voice said to Mr. Kleib: “Shell out—everything in the cage but the silver!”

Now!

Childers deliberately and without sense of direction, except that of the voice, kicked backward with all his force. He felt something soft give and then his heel crunched against bone. There was a curse and a moan, and he heard the clatter of the gun on the floor and the soft thud as his man slid to the marble.

In that instant pandemonium reigned. A huge howler over the door began its siren wail, Tommy-guns rattled, men shouted and women screamed.

Like a flash Jimmy Childers dropped to his hands and knees just as a stream of whizzing bullets spattered against the marble cage front. He grabbed up the fallen gun and turned it on the man that was firing at him, a short, stocky thug in a light-gray suit. He saw the man drop, and as he did another rushed past, headed for the door. Jimmy let the gun fall and launched himself in a flying tackle, grabbing at the fleeing gangster's knees.

The next couple of seconds was a maelstrom of sensation and confusion. Then he was aware of looking at the pants legs of some big man in blue, and a heavy Irish voice saying:

“Leggo, son, you've done enough. We've got him now.”

Childers unwrapped his arms from the bandit's knees and got up. His heart was pounding wildly and he knew his clothes were a wreck, but it was a glorious moment and he didn't care. A circle of men were around him, men with notebooks and

cameras and flashlight bulbs, snapping pictures and asking questions. Next, a big police car screamed its way to the front door, and in a moment he was receiving the unstinted congratulations of a fiery little mayor and his police commissioner.

“Nice work, Childers,” said the latter. “Those eggs have been wanted a long, long time. If there is anything I can ever do for you, call on me.”

Then the president of the bank came and whirled him away to the club for luncheon. What a day! Had so much ever happened to one man before in so short a space of time? And how odd that he had dreamed it all, even to the date of the vintage on the label of the sauterne the banker ordered with the lunch!

Suddenly he realized it was close to two thirty and the first at Aqueduct was probably already run. He excused himself and hastened over to Kelly’s place.

“I’ll take it in big bills,” he said to Kelly, as he went in.

“Optimistic, ain’t you?” was Kelly’s rejoinder. “Didja ever hear of nine horses falling down and breaking their legs in the same race? Well, that’s what it’d take to let that milk-wagon nag—”

“They’re off,” announced the fellow with the headphones on.

“I’ll still take it in big bills,” said Jimmy, serenely.

“I’m damned,” was Kelly’s only comment, a couple of minutes later.

Jimmy Childers had two free hours that somehow were not covered by the dream. He remembered vaguely that he had deposited most of his winnings and then gone for a walk in the park. That he did, but his thoughts were so in the clouds and his pulse pounding so with the sense of personal well-being and triumph that he hardly remembered jumping impulsively into a cab and going to the most famous jeweler’s in the world.

Later he mounted the steps in Genevieve’s house, the ring snuggling in his pocket. He knew exactly how he was to be greeted—for once the pout would be off her face and in its place jubilant excitement. For the evening papers were full of his exploits at the bank, and the reporters had brought out the fact that that morning he had been made manager of the foreign department. The auspices for a favorable reception to his umpty-teenth proposal were good, to say the least.

They went to dinner, just as he knew they would, at the most expensive place in town.

Jimmy ordered carelessly, without a glance at the card.

“Yes, sir,” said the waiter, with that bow that is bestowed only on those that know their way around.

“Why, Jimmy,” she tittered, “you seem to be perfectly at home here.”

“Oh, yes,” he said carelessly, as he flipped the folds out of his napkin. He did not see fit to tell her that in the dream of yesterday—or was it today?—it had been only after thirty minutes study of the intricate card, to the tune of many acrimonious comments by Genevieve and the obvious disapproval of an impatient waiter, that he had picked that particular combination of food and drink. But it had been eminently satisfactory, so why not repeat?

As the evening wore on he found himself more and more eager to get to the place where that culminating kiss occurred. *That* was something he could repeat *ad infinitum*, whether in the flesh or a dream. And when it came, he was not disappointed. After that they had the little ritual of the ring, and still later his departure. His soul soared as it had never soared before.

Or rather, he reminded himself, a trifle ruefully, as it had never soared before in waking life. For after all, the day’s triumphs had had just a little of the edge taken off by his certainty that they would occur.

And as he digested that thought, he concluded he would go straight home and to bed. After all, last night the only thing more he had done was stroll on the Drive, after paying the cigar-store clerk his tip, wrapped in his own glorious thoughts. No other incident had occurred worth reliving, as his pleasure at being able to give such a generous handout as a five-dollar bill was somewhat marred by the repulsiveness of the beggarly old crone who had received it.

So he went straight to his room, locked and bolted the door, and prepared for bed. Just before he turned off the light he surveyed the chair piled high with his purchases with immense satisfaction. Tomorrow he would go forth dressed as his new station in life required. His eye caught the calendar, and instead of striking out the day with his customary black cross, he encircled it twice in red. Then taking good care that the clock was wound, but not the alarm, he went to bed.

The very first thing that startled Jimmy Childers that extraordinary repetitive June day was the alarm clock going off. It shouldn’t have gone off. He remembered distinctly setting it at “Silent” when he went to bed the night before, and thumbing his nose derisively at it. He was a big shot now; he could get down to the office with the Westchesterites, at quarter of ten, not at nine, as heretofore.

He rose on an elbow and poised himself to hurl a pillow at the jangling thing. And then, THEN—

“Good Heaven!” he mumbled. “I’ve done all this before.”

Angrily he bounded out of bed and choked off the offending clock. It took only a swift glance around the room to check the items some quick sense told him were

missing. There were no packages from the haberdasher's, nor ring box. And the calendar stared at him unsullied by red-penciled marks. It was the morning of June 14th!

He dressed in sullen rage, grumbling at his fate. He couldn't stand many double-barreled dreams like that one—they were too exhausting. He'd better see a doctor. And yet—yet it was all so *real*. He could have sworn that all those things had actually happened to him—twice! But then he stopped, more mystified than ever. They had differed somewhat in detail, those two days. He stopped and stared at himself in the mirror and noted he appeared a bit wild-eyed.

"I'll experiment, first," he decided, and hurried out, slamming the door behind.

At the cigar stand he asked the clerk,

"How do you go about betting on the ponies?"

"I can take it," said the fellow, unenthusiastically.

"Here's two bucks," said Jimmy, "put it on Swiss Rhapsody—to win. I hope there's such a horse?"

"If you're not particular what you call a horse," said the clerk, with an air of sneering omniscience. "I'm surprised they let her run at all."

"Why?"

"It takes her so long to finish it throws all the other races late."

"Oh," said Jimmy Childers, but he let the bet stand.

He did not waste three cents on a paper that morning. One glance at the headlines was enough. He had practically memorized its contents two days before. But when he got in the subway he was very careful to give the nasty, quarrelsome-looking old woman who blocked his path as wide a berth as possible.

"Whippersnapper!" she exclaimed venomously, noting his scrupulous avoidance of her. There was a little flurry as people glanced up and had a look at him, then they went back to the reading of their stale newspapers. Jimmy Childers groaned. Was he in some squirrel cage of fate? Did everything have to always come out the same way, no matter what his approach? He resolved to make something come out differently, no matter what the cost.

This time he opened his letter containing the literary check without a tremor, and without joy. He knew he would spend the money, and how. He knew, too, that the things he purchased with it would vanish overnight, leaving him to do it all over again tomorrow. When the messenger came to tell him the big boss wanted him at once, Childers said coldly:

"I'm busy. Anyhow, it's no farther from his desk to mine than it is from mine to his."

The messenger gaped with awe, as if wondering whether lightning would strike. Then he stumbled off toward the chief's office.

"I don't think you understand, Childers," the big boss was saying a moment later, as he stood by Jimmy's desk. "Brown has left and we're giving you his job. It pays two hundred, you know."

"Not enough," replied Childers, gruffly.

"It's all we can afford just now," said the boss pleasantly. "But that's our offer. Think it over. It will be open for a week."

Jimmy Childers stared at his retreating back.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "And I got away with that!"

He went through the bank routine with little change, although he did think something of telephoning the police a tip-off and letting it go at that, but for some unknown but compelling reason he had to go through his act personally. But the thrill was gone. His walk in the park was much less joyous, as the more he tried to digest the strangely repetitive nature of his life the last three days, the more unhappy he became.

"It's like that old song about the broken record," he muttered sourly. "All the kick's gone out of things now." He didn't even bother to go to the jeweler's to select the ring. He knew the stock number by heart. So he merely phoned for it.

The kiss that night was up to par, which was some solace, but aside from that, getting engaged was not so much fun. There was no palpitation of the heart as he hung on her words, wondering what the answer would be. He already knew damn well what the answer would be. What kind of a life was that?

That night he threw the alarm clock out the window.

The very first thing that startled Jimmy Childers that—

"Damnation!" he growled, at the first tap of the awakening bell. He threw, not a pillow, but a heavy book, and watched with grim satisfaction as the face crystal smashed to tiny bits.

When he went out he avoided the cigar stand and took a bus, not the subway.

"Insufferable!" snorted the old hellion he sat down beside. He gasped. It was his nemesis of the subway. Apparently she had decided to vary her program a bit, too. He changed seats and listened with reddening cheeks to the titters of the other passengers.

At the office he had an unexpected telephone call. It was from the clerk at his corner cigar stand.

"Oh, Jimmy," he said, "I guess you were late this morning and didn't have time

to leave your bet—so I placed one for you. Hope you don't mind?"

"What horse?" asked Childers, glumly.

"Swiss Rhapsody. She's a long shot, but—"

Jimmy hung up and stared at the phone in front of him. He just couldn't get away from this thing.

All day long he tried to ring changes on his routine, and with astonishing minor results. But as to the major outcome there was never any difference. He was promoted, he won money, he saved the bank from robbery, he got engaged.

And the days that followed were no different. In the main, the events of June 14th had to be relived and relived until he found himself wincing at every one of the events that once had impressed him as such tremendous triumphs. Finally one day, during the hours usually devoted to the stroll in the park, he flung himself into a psychiatrist's office.

"Hm-m-m," commented the doctor, after he had smitten Childers' knees with little rubber mallets, and had scratched him on the feet and back with small prongs. "All I see are a few tremors. What's on your mind?"

"Plenty," said Jimmy savagely, and poured out his story.

"Hm-m-m," commented the doctor. "Interesting—most interesting."

He scribbled a prescription.

"Take this before you go to bed. It is simply something to make you sleep better. Then come back tomorrow at this same hour."

"Just one question, doctor."

"Yes?"

"What is today's date?"

"The fourteenth." The doctor smiled indulgently.

"And yesterday's?"

"The thirteenth. Come back tomorrow, please."

On the dot Jimmy Childers showed up at the doctor's office the next day—June the fourteenth, according to Childers' calendar. As he barged into the waiting room he was accosted with a chill:

"Name, please?"

He looked at the nurse in astonishment. Why, only the day before he had spent the best part of an hour dictating the answers of a questionnaire to her! He gave her a blank stare.

"The doctor is seen only by appointment," she added, looking at him disapprovingly.

"I . . . I made one yesterday," he stammered. "I was here . . . was examined!"

“You must be wrong,” said she, sweetly. “Doctor just returned from Europe this morning.”

“Oh, hell!” snarled Childers, and rushed from the place. He saw at once what a jam he was in. He had added another piece of furniture to his merry-go-round. That was all. He could vary it within limits, of course, but he would never get anywhere.

Jimmy Childers charged up and down the walks of the park in a frenzy. If only Sunday would come—something to break this vicious circle. But no, there was no way to get to Sunday. With him it was always Friday.

That night he skipped the call on Genevieve. Instead he called her up and made some flimsy, insulting excuse. All she said was:

“You old fibber. You’re just shy. The ring came up and I’m *so* thrilled. Of course I’ll marry you, you silly boy.”

Weak and trembling he hung up. In his hand was a steamship ticket to Buenos Aires on the *Santa Mosca*, sailing at eleven p. m. He would try that on his jinx.

He got aboard all right, despite some arguments about a passport, and turned in at once, after dogging down the port and carefully locking the door. He took three of the tablets the doctor had prescribed instead of the one mentioned in the directions. If it were a dream, he ought to knock it now—different room, different bed, different environment, different everything. Jimmy closed his eyes. That night, the first for many a June 14th, he went to sleep with a ray of hope.

The very first thing that startled—

“Oh, Heaven!” sighed a haggard Jimmy Childers, as he shut off the clock, “another day of it.”

He went through the Red Book almost name by name. He shook his head hopelessly. He had tried almost everything from chiropractors to psychiatrists. Then he found a name that somehow he had skipped. It was under necromancers. At once he grabbed a taxi and flew to the address—a stinking hole under the Williamsburg Bridge.

“Sorry,” said the macabre person he contacted, sitting placidly among his black velvet drapes in a “studio” calculated to send a strictly normal person into the heebie-jeebies, “but I only deal with the dead. That is my specialty. Now if you want a corpse raised, or anything like that—”

“No, no,” said Jimmy hastily, and paid his fee and left. Outside he shuddered at the memory of the funereal atmosphere of the faker’s joint. He hoped fervently that *this* episode wasn’t going to get embroidered into the design. His error was in not

knowing what a necromancer was. He went back to the Red Book. It just had occurred to him that perhaps under sorcerers or thaumaturgists was what he wanted.

He found a lot of them, mostly in Harlem, and made a list.

The first four were as unsatisfactory as the necromancer, a circumstance that was very trying to Jimmy, for he could visit only one a day, using the blank two hours, usually spent in the park. All the rest of the time he had to devote to the tedious business of being promoted, winning money, foiling robberies or making love.

But the fifth man was very much to Jimmy Childers' liking, after he recovered from the shock of the first interview. He found him in a dilapidated office in a shabby neighborhood in Greenpoint, and on the door was crudely lettered the frank but somewhat disconcerting legend, "Master Charlatan." Nevertheless Jimmy went boldly in.

"Ah," said the seer, after gazing for a while in a crystal sphere before him. "I perceive you are the victim of a blessing that misfired."

Jimmy Childers brought his eyes back to the bald-headed, fishy-eyed fat man who had guaranteed to help him. While the master charlatan had been in his semitrance Jimmy had been examining the charts that hung about. Obviously the man he had come to was versatile in the extreme, for there were diagrams of the human palm, knobs of the human cranium, weird charts of the heavens, and all the rest of the props that go with standard charlatanry.

"Now tell me something about this original fourteenth of June," said the sage. "How long ago was it, according to your reckoning?"

"Months and months," moaned Jimmy, thinking back on the intolerable monotony of it all.

"Can you recall the exact details of the first day—I mean the very first one—the prototype?"

"I doubt it," confessed Jimmy. "You see, I've wriggled around and monkeyed with it so much that I'm all balled up."

"Try," said the wise one, calmly.

Hesitantly Jimmy Childers told his story, as best he could remember it, all the way to his going to bed the night of the genuine fourteenth of June.

"Now you begin to interest me," suddenly said the master, opening his eyes from the apparent slumber into which he had relapsed the moment Jimmy had begun talking. "Tell me more about that beggar woman on the Drive. Was she toothless except for a single yellow fang? Did her knuckles come to about her knees? Was she blind in her left eye?"

“Yes, yes,” agreed Jimmy eagerly.

“Aha!” ejaculated the seer, “I thought so. Minnie the Malicious!” He made a note. “I’ll report this to the Guild. She was disbarred long ago—for malpractice and incompetence.”

Jimmy looked mystified.

“She used to be a practicing witch,” explained the great one with a shrug, “now she is just a chiseler. You know . . . cheap curses, pretty enchantments and the like. But just what did she say to you, and *most particularly*, what kind of wishes did you make just after you left her?”

“Well,” admitted Jimmy, “she came up whining and asked for a penny. I was feeling pretty high, so I gave her a five-spot.”

“That was a mistake,” murmured the sorcerer.

“That’s all,” said Jimmy, suddenly concluding. “She mumbled something, and I walked on.”

“But you wished something?”

“Well, I do remember—don’t forget what a wonderful day I’d had—that I was wishing every day was like that, or that I could live it over again, or something of the sort.”

“Be very exact,” insisted his interrogator.

“Sorry,” said Jimmy.

“Let’s go into the Mesmeric Department,” said his consultant, leading the way into a shabby interior room. “Now sit there and keep your eye on the little jeweled light,” he ordered.

It seemed only an instant before Jimmy woke up. The master charlatan was sitting in front of him placidly looking at him.

“Your exact wish,” he said, “was a triple one, as I suspected. They usually are. Here are your mental words, ‘Oh, I wish every day was like this one; I wish I could live it over again; I wish I’d never seen that old hag, she gives me the creeps.’”

“So what?” queried Jimmy, recalling it now.

“When you gave her such a magnificent present, she mumbled out that you would have your next three wishes granted. Oddly enough, if she had been an able practitioner, nothing would have happened—”

“That doesn’t make sense,” objected Jimmy.

“Oh, yes it does. You see, your last wish would have had the effect of canceling the others, as you would never have met her, see?”

“It is a little involved,” frowned Jimmy.

“Yes, these things have a way of getting involved,” admitted the wise one. “However, since she was a low-powered witch, so to speak, only the first wish came fully true, that is, every day—for you—was like that one. By the time you had gotten to the second one some of the punch was out of it. You didn’t *quite* live it over again. You had the power of varying it a little, which was a very fortunate circumstance, as otherwise you would have gone on doing it forever and ever.”

“You mean I’m cured!” exclaimed Jimmy delightedly.

“Not so fast. When we come to the last wish, her power had petered out almost altogether. It did not do away with the fact that you *had* met her, but it was strong enough to cause you to avoid meeting her any more.”

“I see,” said Jimmy, hoping he really did.

“Now what you’ve got to do is to live that day over once more—the first one, mind you—including meeting Minnie; only the minute she mumbles, reverse your wish. That cancels everything.”

“But I can’t remember that day well enough—”

“I’ll coach you,” said the mesmerist. “While you were hypnotized I took it all down, every detail.”

An hour later Jimmy Childers rose to go. He paid over to the magician all the money he had just collected on Swiss Rhapsody. The old man dropped it into his pocket with just the hint of a chuckle.

“By the way,” asked Jimmy, on the threshold, “what day is *this*?”

“That, my friend,” replied the master charlatan with an oily smile, “is a mystery I’d advise you not to look into. Good day!”

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Doubled and Redoubled* by Malcolm Jameson]