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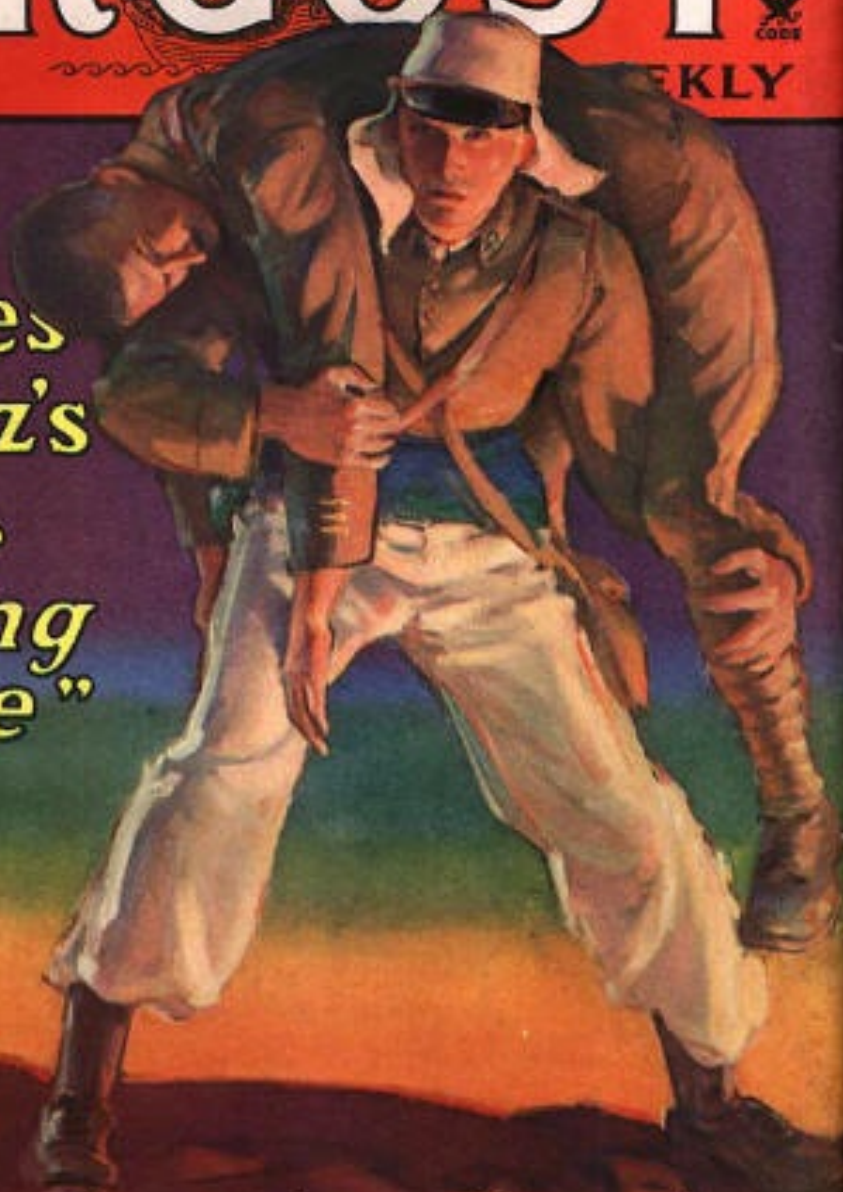
ARGOSY



APR. 20

WEEKLY

Georges
Surdez's
"The
Living
Lose"



A balloon racing novelette by George Bruce

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The Dead Man Types

Ray Cummings

First published *Argosy Weekly*, April 20, 1935.



For a moment MacIntyre stared at the body

Even in death, old Professor Wiggans was able to use a typewriter

Albert MacIntyre stood in the bathroom, with the little blue paper of the poison crystals ready to mix into the old man's drink. It would be his last drink! This

would put him to sleep very nicely within two or three minutes—the sleep from which there was no awakening! The house was very silent. There was no one in it, now at 10 P.M., save MacIntyre and the old man—Professor Jonathan Wiggans. From the bathroom here on the second floor of the small frame cottage, MacIntyre could see across the hall and into the old man’s bedroom. The Professor was already in bed, waiting for the mild and harmless sedative which MacIntyre prepared for him exactly at this hour every night. He depended upon it to waft him off to slumber. He hadn’t been very well this last week or two. Dr. Harris had said it was only nervousness and had prescribed the harmless sleeping powder.

MacIntyre’s opportunity! Tonight the old man would drink a powder not so harmless! There would be a typed suicide note—and Dr. Harris would only be able to say that surprisingly the old man must have developed depressive insanity and killed himself.

“Albert! What you doing in there? I want my bromide.”

The thin querulous voice rang through the silent house. It startled MacIntyre horribly; and he realized that for a minute or two he must have been standing here inactive, with the poison crystals in his hand. It wasn’t easy to pour them into this glass of medicine—just a little thing like that to kill a man.

He called, with a voice not quite steady, “Yes, Professor. I’m coming.”

The crystals slid with a tiny white cascade. There was no effervescence. He twirled the glass a little; he could see them dissolving. Gone now. A lurking death, invisible.

With a clean handkerchief, MacIntyre carefully wiped his fingerprints off the glass. And he carried the glass on a little tray. He left the bathroom and crossed the hall. He was a big man, this Albert MacIntyre—tall and gaunt and wide-shouldered. He saw himself now in the hall mirror—black trousers and white shirt open at the throat; his sleeves rolled half up his forearms, with parted cuff-links dangling, exposing his brawny, hairy wrists. Somehow his scraggly hair had gotten tousled. His long, thin face was grim. He was walking with shoulders hunched, the tray and glass outstretched before him.

The vision came to him of Frankenstein’s monster stalking here. But he mustn’t look like this! He relaxed. He summoned a smile. He said, as he entered the old man’s room:

“You have no insomnia, Professor. If I put nothing in this glass, you would sleep just as well.”

The old man made no comment at having his medicine served from a tray. He took the glass. Like a gaunt statue, MacIntyre stood stiff, towering over the bed.

The old man took the glass with his left hand. Now he was drinking . . . just a few swallows—invisible death, inside its victim now . . .

MacIntyre shoved the tray out and the old man set the glass on it.

“Thanks, Albert. Guess I’ll sleep all right tonight. I feel that way.” He turned his face to the wall, fearing insomnia, determined that he must go to sleep at once.

MacIntyre said, “I shall leave this one light?”

“Yes. Leave everything just the way I have it. Good night, Albert.”

“Good night, Professor.”

“Oh, Albert, will you put the cover on my typewriter? I forgot it.”

The typewriter stood on a table by the windows, not far from the foot of the bed. The old man had been using it earlier in the evening; beside it was a rubberized waterproof fabric cover.

“Sure,” said MacIntyre. He drew the cover over the machine. “It’s done. Good night, Professor. You’ll go right to sleep now.”

MacIntyre retreated only to the hall. He placed the tray with its glass very carefully on a bench. He sat on a small chair, waiting. A minute or two. It seemed that the only sound was MacIntyre’s own heavy breathing. That, and an October night wind, whining under the eaves of the cottage; and with gusts occasionally swishing the trees outside. Lonely neighborhood, this. No houses very close here, and the village was a mile away. No one but MacIntyre could know what was going on here now. The house was locked. All the shades upstairs here were drawn.

No sound from the old man. MacIntyre had studied the thing. He knew fairly well how this tasteless poison would act. A swift unconsciousness like sleep. Then death would come stealing upon him—there might be very little struggle—so old and feeble a victim. . . .

Professor Wiggins was sixty-eight. A bachelor. A frail and thin little man—he weighed hardly ninety pounds. He had been a Professor of History. Now he was writing a book. Some learned, musty historical subject. It would take him years probably, because nothing much ever happened to it, except that the Professor would read abstruse volumes, make many penciled notes; and occasionally type a page or two.

MacIntyre, who was thirty now, had worked for the old man some five years. Sort of paid companion. In reality it was that, and general manservant, cook, butler, chauffeur, valet—everything. MacIntyre had worked well. He was slated now for a fat legacy. The old man had always been rich, and always frugal. MacIntyre had

seen the ten thousand dollar legacy for him in the will the old man drew a month ago. If only the Professor were older. Or sicker. But he wasn't. Dr. Harris had said that he was a tough little fellow, in spite of being so frail. He took good care of himself. He could live twenty years yet.

What good was the legacy! Marj wouldn't wait even one year. And she wouldn't marry a man who was nothing more than a servant. What a queer look she had given him when he told her about the legacy! It seemed to MacIntyre that just that minute had come to him the knowledge that he was going to kill the old man. And now all his plans were perfected. Marj knew nothing; he was too clever to take anybody in on a thing like this. Even Marj.

A sound came suddenly from the bedroom. A groan. MacIntyre leaped to his feet and went to the door. Nothing to do but stand here and watch. He stood tall and gaunt and stiff against the doorway casement; peering, tense. The old man still was lying with his face to the wall. He was breathing harder now. By the dim night-light MacIntyre could see the laboring of the frail body under the sheet and blanket. Then the arms flailed; the knees came twitching up.

Gruesome struggle! It made the vision of the room swim before MacIntyre's gaze, and his own breath come fast and the sweat start on his forehead, so that he turned away and stood in the hall, not wanting to look, but straining his ears to listen. So little to hear; and it was over very soon. Only a minute or two, certainly, of those horrible sounds. Then silence. Death was in there now. Death, the victor, laying a silence over the battle.

Triumph swept MacIntyre. The thing was done. So easy. He went back into the bedroom. The bluish face of the dead thing was shocking to see. Thin body in its white nightgown; knees drawn up; the hands with bluish fingers were clutching at the throat; the face, with gaping mouth and opened staring eyes, was a bluish mask of horror.

But MacIntyre forced himself to master his revulsion. He was calm presently; calm and ready to do, methodically, the things he had to do here before the police came. Everything must show that this was a suicide. That would be easy, for MacIntyre was not going to fake any clues. The suicide note would be authentic. The dead man actually was going to type it now! It would be realistic, sure enough!

MacIntyre took the cover off the old-fashioned typewriter and dropped it on the floor by the table. He took a sheet of the old man's manuscript paper and carefully inserted it in the machine—carefully so as not to get any of his fingerprints on it. There was a small bench in front of the typewriter table. Wide enough for two—

himself and the dead man! MacIntyre's fingerprints wouldn't get on the typewriter keys. Only the dead man's fingers would do the typing!

The body was not heavy; so small and frail that in MacIntyre's powerful grasp it was like lifting a child. He carried the body across the room and sat it on the bench before the typewriter. The rigidity of the death convulsions had gone out of it now. It sat there limp, spineless, with dangling arms and head nodding forward, so limp that it would have fallen without MacIntyre's support. He sat to the right of it, his left arm around it, holding it firmly against him. In spite of himself, he was shuddering. The cursed thing, so limp and wobbly, almost seemed alive.

Now they were ready for the typing—he and this dead thing. MacIntyre held both its hands. They were small; his own entirely covered them. His fingers gripped the two forefingers of the dead man; raised them over the keyboard. All so natural! The Professor never used but these two fingers anyway, pecking with them at the keys. And he was doing that now. Guided by MacIntyre, the two limp fingers slowly pressed the letters one by one. Badly typed. Uneven stroke; and MacIntyre was aware that occasionally he was hitting wrong letters. What of it? The Professor was supposed to be dying now—sitting here typing, with death sweeping at him.

MacIntyre—holding the wobbling dead thing which was slowly typing—read the suicide note as it grew now under the clicking keys.

I just took it. The end. Only a minute now. No use living—always sick. Good-by, Albert—and Doctor Harris—I am dying now—Oh, God help m—

As he composed the words, suddenly MacIntyre felt as though all this were real. This thing in his arms—dying now. Real, of course! There was no fake about this. It would look absolutely natural down to the last detail—because it was happening now. The Professor had come to the end of the note. Of course! That was the logical end. The poison was in his brain now. He would slump forward. He would reach instinctively with his right hand for the suicide note . . .

MacIntyre's mind was whirling. He tried to guide the body with a natural slump forward. He raised the dead thing's right hand, with his own right hand enveloping the cold, clammy fingers—reached up and over the keyboard, across the top of the machine, and made the limp fingers grip the sheet of paper; rip it from the roller. The dead hand crunched it. So natural, all this! In that second, MacIntyre lost control of the body a little. There was a click and rattle in the typewriter as the hand and arm MacIntyre was guiding slumped heavily against it. The dead man's elbow had struck

the keyboard; several of the keys jammed and stayed down. What of it? Natural enough, all this!

Thoughts are instant things. In those two or three seconds, MacIntyre tried to let the dead thing go with a natural, uncontrolled slump. The note was crunched in the dead fingers. The wobbling body slumped to the left and back. And MacIntyre suddenly released it, shoved himself clear of it. The body crumpled, pitched backward, arms out, and struck the floor beside the bench and table.

Done! MacIntyre sat panting. Triumphant. The dead thing at his feet was in so natural an attitude! It had taken poison; sat here typing until the swift death came, then with fading senses it seized its typed note and fell. And there it lay now—twisted figure in the white nightgown, face down, with the right hand outstretched, clutching the crumpled sheet of paper. MacIntyre could never have placed it in such a natural attitude without acting all this out so that the dead thing found the attitude for itself.

For a moment or two MacIntyre sat on the bench, recovering his breath and his wits. He must make sure now that every detail was correct. His own fingers had not touched the typewriter keys or the space-bar. He was positive of that. The detectives would find the dead man's fingerprints—and only his. Some of the keys were jammed down; the type-bars were up in a little tangle. It was absolutely natural. The detectives would see that, at the end of the note, the dying man had slumped against the keyboard, and then had fallen.

MacIntyre stood up and surveyed the room. The bed showed its occupancy. That was all right. But the bedclothes were too rumpled. He smoothed them a little. Everything else was proper. The dead man's garments were neatly arranged on a chair.

Save for that sprawled dead thing on the floor by the typewriter table, the room looked just as it did every night at the old man's bedtime.

MacIntyre had not forgotten the glass out of which the old man drank the poison. He had left it, on its tray, in the hall. He went now and got it, lifting up the tray carefully. He had not touched the glass. It would bear only the old man's fingerprints. The finger prints of his left hand. MacIntyre was forgetting nothing, and he remembered that left hand clearly. He had decided that the most natural place for the glass would be beside the typewriter. The detectives, reading the suicide note, would picture the old man seated there on the bench, drinking the poison, then typing the note and falling. The time would be just right; the poison would make him fall in under two minutes.

The glass, which the old man had held in his left hand, would normally be placed to the left of the typewriter. Close to the left of the machine lay a little pile of the Professor's books. Very carefully, touching the glass only with the ends of his fingernails, MacIntyre slid the glass off the tray and onto the books. There was a little liquid still in the glass. Enough, of course, for the detectives to determine that it was poison.

Everything was correct, now. MacIntyre went to the bathroom. He washed the tray carefully and replaced it on the bathroom shelf where it always stood. He had disposed of the little paper which had held the poison crystals. Everything now was satisfactory in the bathroom. He took a last look around. . . . Now he was supposed to be discovering the death of his employer. It hadn't been long since the death actually occurred—certainly not over ten minutes. MacIntyre was absolutely calm and confident now—so calm that as he went downstairs to the telephone to call Dr. Harris he had to work himself up into a normal fright and excitement. His voice must not sound calm now! He prided himself that he was a good actor. He got the doctor on the wire. He babbled vehemently, half incoherently, of this horrible discovery he had just made—hearing something fall in Professor Wiggan's bedroom—the poor old man lying up there dead—a suicide. . . .

He left the telephone. He stayed downstairs. Tall, gaunt figure, in dark trousers and white shirt, sleeves dangling with parted cuffs disclosing the thick wrists covered with black hair; hunched shoulders, his face grim—like Frankenstein's monster he stalked back and forth the length of the lower hall until Dr. Harris and the police arrived.

Suicide! Of course that was all there was to it. Everybody said that immediately they saw the suicide note. . . . The little cottage which had been so silent was clattering with activity now. Dr. Harris had come, and then the police officials. Several of them were here now. Two or three patrolmen. A captain who was in charge of the case. A fingerprint man who also was a photographer—he had taken a flashlight or two. And the coroner was coming.

Except when he went upstairs with Dr. Harris, MacIntyre had stayed out of the old man's bedroom. They had complimented him on touching nothing when first he had discovered the suicide. And now, after nearly twenty minutes, nothing seemed to have been touched. The gruesome dead thing still lay on the floor—somebody said they were waiting for the coroner. From where he sat in the upper hall by the bathroom, MacIntyre could just see through the opened bedroom door to that huddled white body on the floor. Captain Blake was in there, whispering with Dr.

Harris and one of the other men. Whispering about what? The suicide was perfectly plain. Everybody said so.

MacIntyre had found his own rôle very simple. He had told a rambling, jumbled story to Dr. Harris—just the way anyone would who was wildly excited and shocked. Then Captain Blake had questioned him a little, and he had been more coherent, calmer.

And the captain had nodded and been satisfied.

It was simple enough. Dr. Harris had found the old man dead of poisoning. He had even been able to name, off-hand, the general variety of poison he thought it was. They had spotted the glass, of course. They had said its remaining contents would be analyzed—they assumed, naturally enough, that it was the poison glass. And there would be an autopsy performed on the body.

All correct. MacIntyre smiled to himself. So easy. Everything would check up, and the coroner's inquest would give a verdict of suicide, of course; and the case would be over and done. Already Dr. Harris had said something about it being a sudden attack of depressive insanity. And suicide was absolutely characteristic of it.

In the upper hall MacIntyre sat smoking. All this waiting seemed interminable. And that whispering in there? For no reason at all a shudder swept him. What was going on in there now? Out here in the hall, at the head of the stairs, one of the policemen had been standing for ten minutes. That was normal; but suddenly it seemed that he was eyeing MacIntyre very strangely. Absurd! Only fancy. MacIntyre ground his cigarette end under his heel and immediately lighted another. He mustn't have an attack of nerves. That wouldn't do. And everything certainly was all right. The men in the room presently said a few sentences out loud. The fingerprint man had been working all this time. The dead man's left hand fingerprints were identified on the poison glass. And it seemed that only the dead man had touched the typewriter keys—a good print of his forefinger was identified on the space-bar.

It reassured MacIntyre. They had found that everything fitted together. No case of suicide could ever be more plain. But in spite of himself his heart was pounding as he heard one of the men abruptly coming out of the room. It was Captain Blake. Efficient looking, uniformed figure. He came and stood before MacIntyre. Then he found another chair and sat down.

MacIntyre said, "If I could help any—"

"No. I guess we've about finished." The captain smiled pleasantly. "I thought I'd get you to tell me again how you discovered the death. You had given him a sleeping

powder just a few minutes before, hadn't you?"

Why did he want to hear that over again? He was perfectly casual. But his eyes seemed roving MacIntyre. Searching eyes. What could they expect to find?

"Yes," MacIntyre said. "I gave him the bromide Dr. Harris prescribed. Every night I gave it to him—tonight he seemed no different from every other night. But that is true of depressive insanity—I heard Dr. Harris say it a while ago—they are very foxy? Sometimes they act just as always and yet they are planning suicide?"

The captain said quietly, "You gave him the medicine—and then what?"

Was this policeman trying to see if MacIntyre could tell the same story twice? Was he trying to find some flaw? Nonsense! MacIntyre cursed himself for his guilty conscience which made him have all these doubts. There wasn't a thing wrong. He smiled. He said:

"Well, he was in bed then. He turned his face to the wall like as if he wanted to go to sleep at once. He always did that. So I left him. I was in my own room—upstairs in the attic. Maybe ten minutes went by. That was when he must have gotten up and mixed himself the poison. I thought I heard him in the bathroom. Then I heard a thump. Something falling, and I rushed down and I saw—"

MacIntyre was wringing his big thick hands with the memory of it. And suddenly he checked his words. It seemed that the captain was hardly interested in what he was saying, but was gazing only at his hands, at his bare wrists where his shirt cuffs were dangling. It made the sweat start suddenly on MacIntyre's forehead. What was wrong with his hands, or his wrists, or his dangling shirt cuffs? It seemed that Captain Blake's eyes held a sudden gleam, as though now he saw something for which very quietly he had been looking.

Crazy thoughts! A guilty conscience, nothing else!

But in the bedroom doorway now, Dr. Harris and the fingerprint man were standing, peering, listening.

MacIntyre stammered, "Why, what's the matter? You look so—"

He bit off the words. What a thing to say! And the captain's quiet voice filled in the silence.

"This is a queer affair, MacIntyre. We've had a devil of a time puzzling it out. Because—well, you see, from the very beginning it was perfectly obvious that it wasn't a suicide!"

The dim hall where they were sitting whirled around MacIntyre so that he had to grip the sides of his chair to keep from falling. Not a suicide! But how could they know that? How could it possibly be obvious?

In the chaos of his thoughts MacIntyre heard his voice stammering, "Why—what

you mean? Not a suicide? Why, Captain Blake—”

“Come here and I’ll show you.” The big police captain stood up. He was nearly as big as MacIntyre. He said, “You’ll see how obvious it is.”

Dr. Harris and the fingerprint man stood aside to let them pass. And then followed them. It seemed to MacIntyre that these men were closing in on him. They had all exchanged significant glances. They were drawing a net around him—a net in which he was struggling, entangled. . . . But that was ridiculous. If they knew it wasn’t a suicide, then of course they suspected him of murder. He had been the only other person in the house. But that wouldn’t convict him. That was opportunity—nothing more. You couldn’t convict a man of murder because he had the opportunity and no one else seemed to have been there to do it. Proof was needed. Absolute proof. And there wasn’t anything like that. He had been too careful. All he had to do now was act innocent. Not let his guilty conscience frighten him.

They stood before the typewriter. Everything still was just as MacIntyre had left it, except that they had taken the suicide note from the dead man’s fingers. And they had moved the dead thing on the floor just a little, when they examined it. The horrible eyes were staring up now—staring as though at MacIntyre, watching now to see what was going to happen.

The captain said, “According to what he typed in the note, he sat down here at this bench, drank the poison, put the glass there where you see it, typed the note and fell to the floor with it in his hand.”

But of course! That was exactly what had happened! MacIntyre nodded. “Yes. I understand.”

“But the trouble is,” Blake said quietly, “he couldn’t have typed the note with the glass standing there. Look where the glass is. Don’t you see it’s physically impossible for the typewriter to operate? The carriage will knock the glass off that pile of books the minute you start to type!”

So obvious! MacIntyre saw it now. The little pile of books, close against the left-hand side of the typewriter, came almost as high as the bottom of the sliding carriage. But not quite; the books had not interfered with it when he typed the note! But the glass standing there was too high! The carriage would bump it; push it off the books with the first line of typing! MacIntyre’s mind swept back. When he finished helping the dead man type the note, the carriage had stopped pretty well over to the right. It was there now. And when he put the glass on the books—after the note was typed—he had never thought of the movable carriage!

The vision of the typewriter swayed before MacIntyre. The floor under his feet

seemed swaying. Good God, was he going to faint? He must hold firm. This wasn't accusation. This wasn't proof of his guilt. . . . He heard himself mumbling:

"Why, that's strange. I see that. Of course—that's—very queer—"

"Very," Blake said. "Very queer. And everything else looked like suicide. The dead man's fingerprints on the glass, on the typewriter—oh, he typed the note all right! After he was dead, don't you think, MacIntyre?"

Hold firm! This was a bluff! There wasn't any proof. Trying to frighten him now and get a confession!

MacIntyre managed to say sharply, "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you?" A sudden edge of menace rasped in Blake's voice. "Well, we didn't either, until just a few minutes ago. There's a queer thing about the typewriter. We all overlooked it—just noticed it in the last five minutes. You see those type-bars that are jammed up in a little tangle? Something fell and is caught in there. Half of something. And we've been looking around for the other half."

What was this? Something fell into the typewriter? Half of something? And they were looking for the other half? But what? It seemed, in that horrible second, as though MacIntyre's memory were trying to yield him something. That gruesome moment when he had held the dead man's wrist—he and the dead man had reached with their right hands for the note. It seemed that now he vaguely remembered there had been a sharp tug at his sleeve. As though his dangling cuff had caught in the top of the typewriter. And there had been a click in the typewriter. The click of the keys as the dead man slumped against them? But was it only that?

Mingled with the tumult of MacIntyre's thoughts there was the captain's grim voice. "I found the other half, out there in the hall just now while I was talking with you. Your right-hand cuff there—and take a look into the typewriter. We've got you, MacIntyre!"

His cuff? What did that mean? Something in his cuff? MacIntyre dazedly raised his right hand. He stared at his brawny wrist, with the opened cuff turned back. His cuff links! In two parts, one which pressed into the other, like the snap fastenings of a glove. One half was here now, in the buttonhole of his dangling cuff. But the other half was gone! Gone where?

"Take a look in there, MacIntyre."

And now he saw it—the other half of his right-hand cuff link. Damnably it was here, wedged under the raised type-bars of the typewriter!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Dead Man Types* by Ray Cummings]