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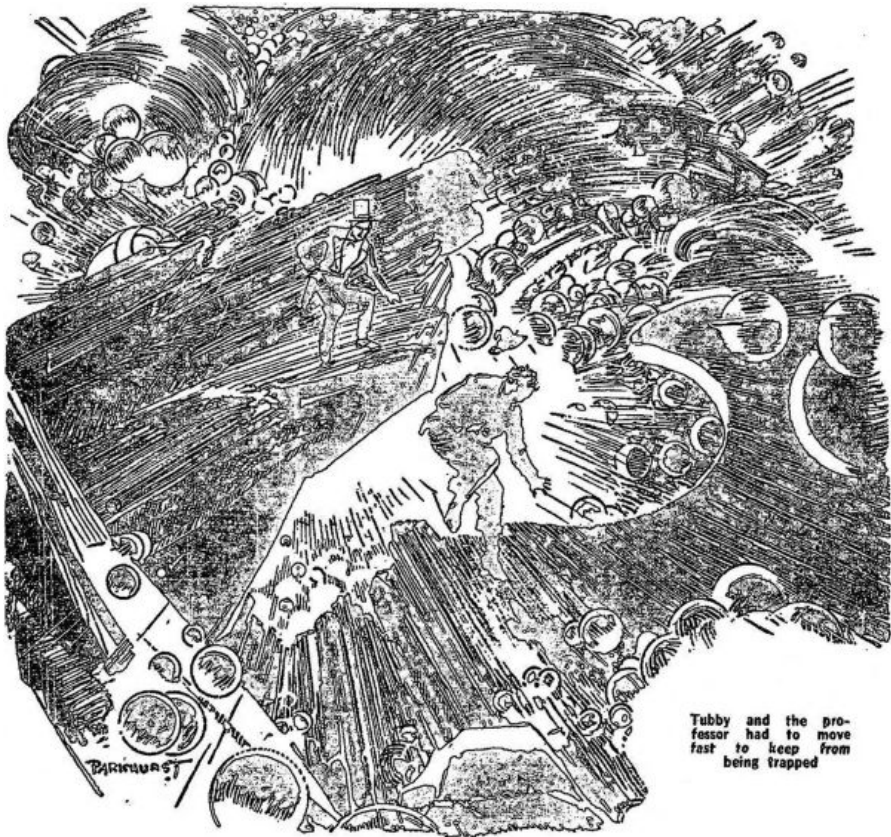
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# UP AND ATOM

RAY CUMMINGS

*Dauntless Tubby and gaunt Professor Pluton learn it's a small world after all when they combat a big menace!*

Tubby and his two friends were late arriving at the lecture. The hall was already jam packed.

"Come on, shove right in," Tubby said. "We gotta get seats."

On the flag-draped platform, a fat woman was singing the "Star Spangled Banner." Everybody was standing.

"Bombs bursting in air!" the fat woman was singing.

Tubby chuckled. "Neat touch." It was a nice idea to sing that song at the start of this lecture on "Democracy's Defender—the Atomic Bomb."

Tubby had good luck. The ushers were bringing out some little folding chairs to take care of the overflow. Tubby, Jake and Pete obtained seats at one side, in front near a little group of the important local people who had arranged the lecture.

When the "Star Spangled Banner," was finished, the fat woman bowed graciously. She evidently was somebody important in the town, because all the ushers came running forward with flowers. She carried all that she could, and the ushers brought the rest and piled them around her when she took her seat. It happened to be right in front of Tubby.

With an empty seat there, Tubby's view had been fine. Everything was different now. With all the big floral pieces crowded around her, he could still see the platform a little, but it was like looking through a forest of big leaves and blossoms.

"'S an outrage!" he mumbled audibly.

"Shut up!" Jake hissed. "The lecture's gonna begin."

The lecturer was a tall, skinny young man, very pale faced, with a dark forelock. He was dressed in black clothes.

He began to talk. Interesting stuff, this atomic bomb business. Tubby settled himself more comfortably and stared through the forest of flowers.

"Before I deal with the atomic bomb itself," the lecturer was saying, "and explain the general nature of atomic fission, and our modern scientific development of it into the atomic bomb, I am going to take you figuratively speaking, into an atom itself and let you look around. Let us picture the interior of an atom—its structure, which in a way, you might liken to our starry universe itself." Deep stuff this!

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The lecturer droned on. Now he was tossing Uranium 235 and Plutonium 238 and electrons and slow-moving neutrons around just as though they were nothing unusual. The lecture hall was hot and there wasn't very much air, but Tubby didn't mind. Anybody with a good keen brain gets a real thrill delving into deep stuff. Suddenly he felt his sleeve being twitched.

"Quit it, Jake," he mumbled. "I'm listenin'."

But it wasn't Jake. It was his left sleeve, beyond which there was a dim little open space at the side of the hall. The twitch came again.

“Oh, Tubby—Tubby!” an urgent voice murmured, “I’m so glad I found you!”

Tubby turned around. A little man in a big plug hat was standing close beside him. He was dressed all in black, and he was so shriveled his clothes hung on him in folds.

“Tubby!” he said again. “You are Tubby, I know. It’s a matter of life or death!”

“Whose death?” Tubby murmured. It certainly sounded important.

“The people of New York City,” the little man said. “Thousands! They’re doomed to die if we don’t stop it!” He had Tubby on his feet now, and was shoving him through the side exit. “I just found it out a little while ago, and I knew you were the man to help me.”

They were out on the dark, tree-lined side street now, and the stranger was hurrying Tubby along. They were going so fast that both of them were panting. With the deaths of millions of people in sight, that was natural.

“Maybe you better tell me who you are and what we’re gettin’ into,” Tubby said.

“I’m Professor Pluton,” the little man said. “I’m a physicist. In fact, you might say, I’m the most important physicist in the world.”

“Pleased to meet you, Professor,” Tubby said.

“All my life,” the professor went on, “I’ve delved into the mysteries of the atom—the problem of atomic fission. You could say, indeed, that *I* was the one who solved it.”

“Atomic fission’s deep stuff,” Tubby said.

“It is indeed,” the professor agreed. “But *I* mastered it. My co-workers call me the original Atom Boy because I worked on the atom bomb.”

With a life and death crisis right ahead of them, Tubby decided to get down to the meat of the thing.

“But you said a million people are gonna get killed,” he said. “What’s gonna kill them, and what do we do to stop it?”

The answer was simple. A villainous coworker of Professor Pluton—one Dr. Stress Tork, another professor, had stolen an atom bomb of the most horrible, murderous type, all complete, with firing mechanism all set ready to go! Worse than that, this Tork had a new-type, one man control bombing plane.

“I found it out just a little while ago,” Professor Pluton was saying. “He’s got it on his secret takeoff ramp and he’s going to—to drop that bomb on New York City. New York City, with its teeming millions! Think of it, Tubby! An atom bomb of the worst type!”

Tubby realized this Tork guy was pretty mean.

“Worse than that, Tubby,” the professor said. “He expects to conquer the world and then become the Supreme World Dictator.”

“Sure has got big ideas,” Tubby commented. “Is his place far from here?”

They had now reached the edge of town. The professor gestured toward a nearby, dark wooded hillside.

“It’s on the further side of that hill,” he said.

“That makes it easy, Professor,” Tubby said. “We’ll go right at him now and beat his brains out. He’s only one, and we’re two.”

But the problem wasn’t that simple. It seemed that Tork was a suspicious fellow. His place here on the dark hillside was surrounded by a high, electrified fence. And inside that there were photoelectric cell beams—the electric eye—behind which Tork had a whole arsenal of weapons.

It was enough to give anybody pause, even Tubby.

“So what do we do?” Tubby demanded. “I don’t want to walk into no electric fence.”

But the professor had thought it all out carefully. “We’ll get in,” he said. His hand touched the bulging pocket of his long black coat. “I’ve brought equipment from my laboratory.”

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Ahead of them Tubby saw a big, twenty-foot-high electric fence. There was a tiny light in a dark building behind the fence, and Tubby could dimly see what looked like a distant takeoff ramp, with a plane standing there.

“Good enough!” the professor whispered. “He’s still got the bomb in his laboratory. We’re just in time.”

To Tubby, things looked hopeless. “But we can’t get over that fence, Professor.”

“So we’ll go under it!” the professor whispered triumphantly. “See that little six-inch space under the bottom wire? We’ll walk in under there. And we’ll be so small, we’ll avoid setting off his alarm systems.”

The professor seemed suddenly to have gone off his mental beam. But he hadn’t.

“It’s one of my biggest inventions, Tubby,” he explained. “I’ve got a drug, a drug so powerful that it shrinks every tiny cell in our bodies, yet preserves their shape.”

A sort of anti-growth drug. “We get small,” Tubby said. Then a nasty thought occurred to him. “So far, so good, Professor. But how do we get large again? I don’t always want to be small.”

They were now crouching close to the electrified fence. From one of his pockets the professor produced two smallish vials.

“Naturally, I thought of that,” he said. “The second drug, to make us large again, wasn’t hard to develop. It’s merely the direct antithesis of the other.” He opened one of the corked vials, and took out two tiny pellets of the drug. His thin fingers were shaking with excitement as he handed one to Tubby.

“Roger,” Tubby said. He put the pellet on his tongue. It was certainly powerful stuff. It made Tubby’s head reel. When the world steadied again another startling thought occurred to him. “Hey, Professor! What about our clothes while we’re gettin’ so small?”

“At ease, Tubby. I’ve tested all that. The drug affects anything which is within the magnetic field it sets up around us. Our clothes will dwindle the same as we do.” The little professor laughed unsteadily. “Stand up, Tubby, and look around you.”

Tubby obeyed. There certainly was a lot going on in the world. Everything was in motion, dwindling in size, getting steadily smaller, with a creeping crawling movement. The electric fence was already not much taller than Tubby. And it seemed to be crowding closer. He could almost reach out and touch it now.

Something was wrong here! The pills were working on the landscape, not on Tubby and his companion! The professor wasn’t changing size.

“Hey!” Tubby gasped. “What’s goin’ on here? It’s that fence that’s changin’, not us.”

“Not at all,” the professor mumbled. “That fence is getting smaller because we’re getting larger, expanding in size— Oh, dear! Oh my goodness!”

The poor little professor now realized exactly what was happening. Something was indeed very wrong. He and Tubby had planned to dwindle in size, but they were getting bigger very rapidly. The fence already wasn’t much higher than Tubby’s waist. In another minute he’d be able to step over it easily.

“Oh my goodness gracious!” the professor was gasping. “I gave us the wrong drug! I gave us the one to make us large! Oh, dear! However did I make that mistake?”

So what? Tubby gripped him.

“Listen, Professor,” Tubby said swiftly. “Everything’s swell. We’ll jump the fence and grab that little midget.”

“We don’t dare,” the professor gasped. “We’re so big he’ll discover us any second now! And he’s got big elephant guns, and artillery too.”

Even a giant can be killed with a cannon. The professor was right. It was certainly too long a chance to take. The professor had the vial of the other drug out of his pocket now. Hastily he and Tubby took a double dose. Everything went haywire again.

When things steadied, Tubby saw that the fence and the house had expanded. The fence looked monstrous, thirty or forty feet high.

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Everything kept getting bigger and bigger and further away. There was already quite a lot of jagged, rough ground between them and the fence.

“Oh, dear!” the professor gasped again. “We’ve got to run, Tubby. We’re getting small so fast.”

The ground was expanding so quickly that it was quite a distance to the fence. When they got there, the monstrous wire cables of the fence loomed above them, the bottom cable now not much higher than Tubby’s head.

“Perfect!” the professor exulted. “We’re just about down to six inches high.”

They didn’t have to duck. The expanding cable continued rising up. They ran under it and across a dark stretch of tumbled ground where a monstrous house loomed up.

“That’s the open doorway!” Professor Pluton panted. “Oh, dear, I guess we took too much of the drug! We’re getting small so fast. Keep running.”

The drug, fortunately, was slowing up, or they would never have made it. They climbed desperately over rocks and boulders, and twigs that now were like big fallen trees on the expanding ground. Then, at last things remained about the same size.

“We’re about two inches tall,” the professor whispered. “Here we are at the doorway.”

The wooden floor was jagged with monstrous splinters, and it was pitted with yellowish holes, crevices and tiny gullies. Overhead the light was a great blurred area of yellow radiance.

The professor gripped Tubby’s arm. “There he is. Look! He’s adjusting the bomb now.”

The bomb was maybe fifty or a hundred feet from them—a huge gleaming cylinder towering into the air. Beside it a great blurred moving thing loomed up, with monstrous trousers and feet that seemed twenty or thirty feet long.

“There he is!” Professor Pluton murmured in awe. “Come on, Tubby. He won’t notice us.”

That much seemed pretty certain.

“But where we goin’, Professor?” Tubby demanded. Surely they couldn’t very well attack this two-hundred-foot giant.

“I’ll show you,” the professor said. “Trust me, Tubby. I’ve got everything planned.” He chuckled. “We’re walking right under the beams of his photoelectric cells now. His alarm systems are useless. We won’t set them off, being so small.”

But the murderous Tork was evidently a very thorough fellow. Even two inches of height wasn’t enough to avoid his intricate scientific safeguards. Suddenly pandemonium broke loose. Great patches of light were flashing in the air overhead and bells were clanging wildly. And the canalboats of Tork’s feet were swooping around.

“Duck and run!” Tubby gasped.

They could have been mashed by one of those canalboats, so they crouched down behind an empty cigarette package and hoped for the best.

Luckily, Tork didn't discover them. The villain evidently decided that it was a false alarm. His swooping feet quieted down and the chaos of lights and clangs subsided.

"All right now," the professor whispered. "Come on."

It was quite a climb up the bulging side of that blimp-bomb. Fortunately there were projections and ramps, but even so Tubby and the professor were about exhausted before they got through climbing.

"Here it is," the professor said. It was a wide, dark open space into the side of the bomb. Like a tunnel-entrance it seemed, though, as the professor explained, it was really only a little lateral opening a couple of inches wide. Like human mice they scampered into it. Then Tubby stopped.

"But where we goin'?" Tubby protested.

"We're in the firing mechanism of the bomb, Tubby," Professor Pluton answered. "That's what you might call the trigger, over there."

The trigger was a shining diagonal beam maybe a hundred feet long, that sloped off into a space crowded with shining shapes of rectangular shafts and beams, and tubes and grids.

In the firing mechanism of an atomic bomb! Somehow it seemed pretty dangerous to Tubby.

"Listen, don't let's do anything wrong, Perfessor!" Tubby warned.

"Of course not," Professor Pluton said. He pulled Tubby forward. "I've built thousands of these bombs. That's the atomic charge, over there."

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The heart of the bomb! The little chunk of substance, which would split apart, by that miracle of nature called atomic fission. It was a jagged slab of shining stuff, clamped into all the intricate beams and shafts and cables which were suspended here.

Tubby was awed.

"That's Plutonium Two-thirty-eight," the professor murmured. "We're going to take more of the drug—a lot more of it. In fact, we're going into that Plutonium. Into one of its atoms."

Right into the center of things, so to speak.

The professor glanced at his watch. "We've got to hurry, Tubby. Tork is going to drop the bomb at midnight, and it's now nine-thirty-five."

It seemed quite an assignment. No wonder they had to hurry. "And what do we do when we get in the atom?" Tubby demanded.

"I'll tell you, all in good time," the professor panted as Tubby boosted him up onto the slab of Plutonium. "I've got it all planned."

Tubby certainly hoped so. They stood on the shining slab, with a glowing abyss all around them. The professor was fumbling in his pocket.

"Now we'll take more of the dwindling drug," he said. "A lot more. Oh, dear, where did I put those vials?" He produced them, but his hands were shaking so much with eagerness that he dropped them onto the Plutonium ground.

"Take it easy," Tubby warned. "And don't get 'em mixed this time, Perfessor, We wouldn't want to get big in here. Might bust somethin'."

"Yes, yes. I'll be careful."

They each took three of the pills this time—the right drug, evidently, because Tubby could see the Plutonium on which they stood, expanding rapidly.



It was startling. Everywhere shining pits were opening up, enlarging into ravines, then into valleys.

“Come on, Tubby,” the professor said, “We got to climb down.”

They tried to run down a long ramp strewn with loose glowing boulders, but they fell, and it was a long slide. Soon they were up, and running on a shining desert where the sky overhead glowed with a dazzling light. For an hour they were busy descending into one abyss after another.

At last it seemed that they had again reached equilibrium. The shining desert had stopped expanding.

“Okay,” Tubby said. “I’m glad that’s over. So here we are in the atom, Professor. Now what?”

“The atom?” The professor shook his head. “Dear me. Why, we haven’t even gotten small enough to be down to the molecules yet. Though I do think the molecules seem to be taking shape. See that blurred roundness out there at the horizon?”

Across maybe a thousand miles of the glowing desert there were vague roundish shining blurs off in the sky.

“That’s where we go?” Tubby demanded. “Well, we won’t never make it, not in forty years. Not unless we fly.”

“And that’s just what we’re going to do,” Professor Pluton cried. “That’s where my atom-flyer comes in. It’s my own invention, and now the time has come to use it.”

From his bulging pocket he produced a little white-metal cage about the size of a lump of sugar. Carefully he placed it on the ground at their feet.

“There it is. Now we’ll get into it, Tubby.”

“By gettin’ small, and leavin’ it stay the size it is,” Tubby said. He understood matters now. They barely touched a pellet of the dwindling drug to their tongues. The cage expanded, they darted inside and the professor slid the door-grating closed.

“Now the drug’s magnetic-field aura around us will dwindle the flyer with us,” Professor Pluton said. “Here we go, Tubby.”

It was a cage room about twenty feet square now. Off to one side there were two chairs with a bank of intricate controls before them.

“My space-flying controls,” the professor explained. “I just turn on either intensification, or repulsion of gravitational force, and we move in space.”

They took a whole slue of the dwindling drug this time, and were off with a rush on the journey. It was quite an adventure, hurtling through space in that glowing, humming cage. The shining desert under them dropped away, as they speeded upward, dwindling and dwindling. Through the cage bars Tubby could see depths of space around them. As the dwindling cage hurtled at them, more space opened up.

The professor darted directly toward one great blurred blob. It hung in the glowing sky maybe not more than a thousand miles away.

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Like an arrow they headed at it, and more realms of space opened up—space with other things swimming and shoving around. The atoms! And then the professor selected one atom and they hurtled at it. The atom expanded in front of them until it filled all the sky.

“We’re in the atom now,” Professor Pluton said.

It was certainly strange. The whole firmament everywhere consisted of silent fireworks, moving slowly in great glowing circles like the earth going around the sun.

“Electrons, neutrons!” the professor was murmuring with awe.

But everything was moving so slowly! Tubby mentioned it.

“That’s because time has changed as well as our size,” the professor explained. “All this is only a fraction of a second now, compared to what time was to us when we started the trip.”

“What do we do now, Perfessor?” Tubby demanded.

That brought the little professor into alertness. “Eh? Oh, the purpose of our trip, Tubby.” He fumbled into his big pocket again. “We come now to my greatest invention,” he said.

The little gadget he produced looked sort of like a cannon with a grid across its muzzle. It was about six inches long, with a lot of wires fastened to it.

“With this,” Professor Pluton said, “I’m going to introduce into this atom a slow-moving neutroid. A *neutroid*, you understand. Not a neutron, as in ordinary atomic fission. The neutroid is my own development.”

As he set up the little cannon to fire through the bars of the cage, Tubby had an alarming thought.

“You’re gonna make atomic fission break out here, Perfessor? Take it easy! We gotta get away before things blow up!”

“Of course, Tubby. But you see, time is very different here.” Before Tubby could stop him, he fired the gadget. From the grid-muzzle a tiny radiant smoke-ring puffed out and floated off into space.

“There it goes, my neutroid,” the professor murmured. “It will bring on a new type of atomic fission. Something so very different.”

But atomic fission is atomic fission, and here they were at the very nub of it, so to speak. Tubby let out a yell. But the smiling professor wasn’t disturbed.

“Don’t be silly, Tubby. The explosion won’t come for some ten years yet, by the Atomic Time in which we are now living.”

Deep stuff. But it reminded Tubby that they were actually inside the atomic bomb, and that Tork was going to explode it in his own diabolical fashion, at midnight.

“Hey Perfessor,” Tubby said. “Remember that guy Tork? What time is it now?”

The professor produced his watch, took a look.

“Oh, dear!” he moaned. “Oh, my goodness!”

“What’s up now?” Tubby demanded.

“I forgot to wind my watch this morning! It stopped at ten o’clock tonight, while we were coming in here.”

And what time was it now? It could be nearly midnight already!

“Jumpin’ jingoes!” Tubby yelled. “We gotta get out of here in a hurry.”

That was obvious. With trembling hands, the professor produced the vials of the drugs.

“No! That’s the wrong one!”

He flung away the nearly empty vial. Then he dropped the other one on the floor. Tubby picked it up.

“Okay, don’t get scared, Perfessor.”

Panic was too dangerous. They could so easily do something wrong! Tubby helped the professor get out the little pellets of the expanding drug and they each swallowed a handful.

It was quite a trip back. A real rush, you might say, with the shining, fireworks interior of the atom dwindling, closing in on them with dizzying swoops. Then the molecules were outside, shrinking and crowding together as the humming, expanding cage hurtled outward

and upward. The handful-dose of the expanding drug had nearly worn off by the time they had landed on the Plutonium desert.

They abandoned the atom-flyer and took another big drug-dose. Standing on the shrinking Plutonium rocks, Tubby saw the little cage dwindle and vanish at their feet. They had to be quick, climbing up out of ravines, before they closed in. Once the professor nearly got his legs caught, but Tubby hauled him clear.

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At last they were standing breathless on the upper surface of the little Plutonium slab. It was about twenty feet across. Then ten. Then five.

“Come on,” Tubby panted. “Jump down!”

They tumbled onto a metal ramp. The drug had nearly worn off again, but Tubby could see that things here in the bomb were all shrinking, closing in.

“Hurry, Professor! Don’t let’s get jammed in here. We’d be all mashed up.”

They barely avoided disaster by tumbling out through the little slit on the side of the bomb. They were growing so fast they took a chance and slid, and jumped.

They landed unhurt. There was light here, and a roaring hum. Where were they? For a minute they clutched each other. Nearby Tubby could see the sausage shaped bomb casing. But it wasn’t so big now. It got smaller. Soon it was about a twelve foot cylinder, racked here near them.

“Why!” the professor exclaimed. “We’re in the bomb-bay of his plane! And we’re in the air. Tork’s heading for New York now.”

Through a port of Tork’s new-type one-man bomber, they could see down where, in the night the great city of New York was spread beneath them. So it was now almost midnight. The villainous Tork was ready to drop his bomb. Millions of people in New York would be killed.

There wasn’t a second to lose. Fortunately they had reached their normal size again. Tubby leaped to his feet.

“Come on, Professor! Up and at him!”

With the little professor scrambling after him, Tubby dashed up the short narrow steps. And there was the villain Tork seated at the bomber’s controls. He was a big, brawny man, heavily goggled. His black hair was parted over one ear and plastered down. He looked just like Hitler.

“That’s him!” the professor squealed. “He copies Hitler. He admired Hitler!”

The only warning Tork had was the professor’s squealing voice. With a jump Tubby was on him.

“Now, you dirty villain!” Tubby roared. “Enough is enough. Murderin’ millions is too many.”

Tork gave an answering roar, let go of the controls and leaped to meet Tubby. It was quite a fight, man to man stuff, with the professor crouching in a corner. Tork and Tubby fought all over the cabin.

“Hit him, Tubby!” the professor was squealing. “Hit him harder, Tubby!”

It was a good idea, and Tubby was doing his best with it. But Tork could hit, too. The cabin was wrecked. The plane lurched and went out of control. Things were hissing and crackling. The controls were shattered. Wind was sweeping and surging and sucking around. A roaring filled Tubby’s ears.

“Hit him, Tubby! Hit him harder!”

“That’s what I’m tryin’ to do!” Tubby panted.

Then he was gripping Tork and shoving him through an opening. Tork went out on his ear. With a last scream he fell downward, into the abyss of space under the lurching plane.

“Gottcha!” Tubby roared. “There he goes, Perfessor! Dirty villain!”

So far, so good. But there were plenty of other things to think about. The wrecked plane was falling. As Tubby stood panting, gripping the tilted, plunging cabin, he could see a wing break off. And flames were springing up.

“Perfessor! Perfessor! Got to get out of here.”

Drunkenly the plane had swooped off sideward. They weren’t over New York City now, they seemed to be north of it. The dark green countryside of Westchester was under them. A moon-bleached landscape was coming up fast. In a minute or two they’d crash, bomb and all. They’d have to bail out. Where did Tork keep his parachutes?

Tubby found them. He fitted one on. Then he leaped, counted five, and pulled the ripcord. Above him, the big ’chute ballooned out in a great spread of swaying white. Okay, swell. And then suddenly as he dangled in the air, swaying like a huge pendulum, he found that the professor was clinging to him. The professor had gotten mixed up for he had taken the same ’chute as Tubby. But he didn’t weigh much so it didn’t make much difference.

“We’re safe!” the professor murmured, when he could get his breath. “Very neat, Tubby. You did everything fine. And there goes the plane.”

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Off to one side, far below them, the plane, bomb and all, was hurtling down with a big trailer of flame above it. A wooded hillside was under it.

“My bomb with a slow-moving neutroid in it,” the professor murmured. “Now you’ll see my greatest invention. The new-type atomic bomb, not diabolic, but benign. Not destructive, but a real boon to mankind. This moment is historic, Tubby. The birth of the New Era of beneficent bombs! And nobody will ever use the old ones again. You wait and see.”

They certainly didn’t have to wait long. In another second, there was a burst of radiance. It came slowly, and then it glowed and spread. For a moment it was like the soft roselight of a beautiful dawn—and then for a second or two, full daylight. The lovely light of a June day. It glowed and then faded. The chilly starlight and moonlight of the March night closed in again.

“Wasn’t that beautiful?” Professor Pluton murmured. “Lovely June warmth.”

They could feel the warmth now, coming up at them in gentle perfumed puffs.

“The bomb burst,” Tubby said. “Very pretty, Perfessor. And is that all?”

“All? Why, it’s only beginning. Down there, for miles around, the radioactivity of the bomb is spreading. But it’s not harmful radioactivity. It’s beneficial.”

He didn’t get a chance to say any more, because the ground was coming up under them as the ’chute settled down. They barely missed a tree.

“Watch it, Perfessor!” Tubby warned. But they couldn’t do anything. With its double burden the ’chute dropped them pretty hard. Tubby’s knees buckled under him and then the ground hit him with a bump. A really nasty bump, so nasty that all Tubby knew after it, was nothing at all.

Then he opened his eyes, to find himself lying on the ground in the moonlit woods with the professor beside him.

“You dead, Perfessor?”

The little professor struggled back into consciousness. He was dazed, but his mind went right back to where it had left off.

“Isn’t it wonderful, Tubby? The bomb burst right near here. We’re right in the heart of the radioactivity!”

Beneficent radioactivity. A warming nourishment to everything growing here. A new spark of growth, of productiveness. Instead of withering things as it would under the blast of ordinary radioactivity, the vegetation here was springing into supernatural life and growth.

This was a chilly, March night. But the vegetation didn’t know it. Buds were opening. Leaves and vines and thickets all around here were stirring with growth, so swift that you could see it. And you could hear it, a million million tiny pops and rustlings.

“Why—why,” Tubby murmured. “June is bustin’ out all over, ain’t it?”

“And the ground for miles is now so fertile,” the professor enthused, “that you can grow vegetables ten times as big as they used to be. Nobody will ever be hungry again. Mine is the only kind of atomic bomb anybody will ever use again! This will revolutionize the world! Don’t you see that?”

But what Tubby saw was a slithering vine coming down off a monstrous growing tree. It came with a rush of growth and suddenly it was seizing Tubby and the little professor. And not just one vine—another came, too.

Abruptly Tubby realized that the over-stimulated vegetation was attacking them. Why wouldn’t it, boosted like that with radioactivity? It would, and it did! Suddenly there was nothing here but a chaos of lashing vegetable things, struggling and twisting. A vine like an octopus or a python had Tubby by the leg!

“Perfessor! Perfessor!”

But in all the bursting, crunching, slithering chaos, the little professor was whirled away. And now there were struggling flowers here. Giant, monstrous pink and yellow and blue blossoms. They slithered and swayed, with reaching tentacles. The perfume of them was choking, sickening.

And behind them a big American flag was swaying. Tubby tried to fight his way toward it. . . .

“He’s all right now, I guess.” That seemed to be Jake’s voice. Where was the professor? Why was Jake here?

“Yeah, guess so.” And that was Pete’s voice. “Guess he’s comin’ to at last. Yeah, sure is. Lookit, he’s openin’ his eyes.”

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Tubby opened his eyes to a white hospital room. One eye, to be exact, because the other was covered with bandages. A lot of him seemed to be covered with bandages, as a matter of fact. But still he could see the white room, and the little white bed in which he was lying, with Jake and Pete bending anxiously over him and a white-clad hospital nurse in the background.

“What—what happened?” Tubby muttered. “Who did this to me?”

“The ushers at that there atom lecture,” Jake said. “You got pretty rough, smashin’ things up and battin’ them flowers around.”

“You sure did,” Pete said. “What’d you do? Go off your head or somethin’.”

“It was the perfume of them flowers,” Tubby mumbled. “Yeah. Yeah, that’s what it was.”

“Or maybe you fell asleep,” Jake suggested. “And had a nightmare. Maybe, eh?”

Tubby didn’t bother to answer him. Outside in the hospital corridor, people were tramping past the door.

“What’s that goin’ on?” Tubby demanded. He felt nearly okay now. He raised up on one elbow, and grinned at the pretty nurse. “What’s goin’ on around here?”

“Oh, that,” the nurse said. “Just a medical lecture, in the auditorium down the hall. If it bothers you, I’ll close the door.”

“A lecture?” Tubby sat up electrified. Then he jumped out of bed. But standing didn’t feel so good. He sat down on the bed again.

“Get me a wheelchair, nurse!” he commanded. “Come on now, make it snappy. What’s the lecture about?”

“Just medical stuff,” the nurse said. “The Romance of Penicillin, Sulfadiathole and Sulfadiazene, is what it’s called.”

Tubby beamed. “Swell. That sounds wonderful. Hurry up with that wheelchair, nurse. We don’t wanta be late.”

He was still beaming through his bandages as the nurse wheeled him down the hospital corridor. Penicillin. Sulfadiathole. Sulfadiazene. Anybody with a good keen brain gets a real thrill delving into deep stuff.

[The end of *Up and Atom* by Ray Cummings]