

SPICY MYSTERY STORIES

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ACROSS

He was seized from behind; chloroform filled his nostrils. . . .



A girl he didn't know, but who said she was his wife . . . an armament gang after his inventions . . . and then a catastrophic transformation of time! Carter had to find some way of eliminating six years of his life, years that barred him from the girl he loved

6 YEARS

By CURTIS BLOUNT



CARTER SETON glanced briefly at the simmering retort over the electric heater, followed the neck of the retort to the angling end-tube of opaque black pyrex, then looked at the thermostat. Even as his left thumb and forefinger made a slight adjustment at the switch, his right hand lowered the pencil to the bottom line of the neatly arranged series of symbols and figures on his notebook page.

The early afternoon sun pushing through the smudged window of his third floor laboratory entered the retort and was refracted by the agitated, amber liquid in slivers of gold light that traced

barely visible fretwork over his formulae.

Carter's pulse was thudding importantly and his face was flushed and warm. He had it . . . he *almost* had it! The solution to the experiment he'd been working on for the past year under the Wilburson Fellowship.

A single, self-sufficient rap sounded at the door. Carter frowned, pencil poised. "Who is it?" he asked irritably.

"It's me, honey—Fran." Her voice tinkled with a merry thinness, a faint ring of hardness.

Carter's frown deepened, yet his heart thudded even more excitedly. Damn the woman! Why must he be so affected by

her? Why must he shame himself by this helpless infatuation for a girl who even had admitted mischievously to him that he wasn't her only sweetheart? She was that sure of him.

SLOWLY he turned the thermostat down to zero, and sighed as the agitation of the liquid subsided. He covered the figures with a blank sheet before going to the door.

An appealing and faintly freckled little nose wrinkled at him. "Having fun?" Black eyes shone and danced with malicious glints. "But of course"—she tiptoed to deliver him an unsolicited kiss—"of course you couldn't when I'm not here."

His head retreated. "I've told you not to come here." His lips lined tightly in anger. "You know I've work to do, and somebody might drop in. That Wilburson Committee. . ." He shrugged. "They might get tough, end the fellowship checks. Then I couldn't see you at all." He drew her into the room and closed the door.

She said coolly: "They'd think I'm a no-good woman, wouldn't they? They'd say your respectability didn't measure up, and so on. Well, damn them, and you too! I don't have to see you at all!"

But even as she spoke, she had moved past him and flung off her coat, draped it carelessly across a chair. The scene was a re-take; and she'd won each time before. She won now. By the simple maneuver of turning and pressing her provocatively yielding form against him. Her lips brushed his as she murmured:

"Kick me out, honey; give me the air. But I like you, I really do . . . you do something to me . . . *here!*" She touched the pliant curve over her heart, then grinned impudently and added: ". . . and *here!*" Her hand moved across her bosom. Her laughter bubbled softly into

his mouth, was stifled by his savage and despairing kiss. Another tiny wrinkle deepened imperceptibly in Carter Seton's cortex and strengthened the compulsion of his infatuation.

HE HAD met her on a wild party while he was still in college, last year; a party girl. He'd had to see her often after that, and she came to know it. Why she took such a fancy to him, he didn't know, for he had no money. "You're sweet . . . different from the others," was the only answer she'd ever give him. Oh yes, of course there was someone for him to be different from! Some nights when he wanted a date she couldn't give it to him.

As he kissed her now, she snuggled a little closer, in a sliding, standing-on-tiptoe way she had, and ran her cool fingers over his head and face and throat, deliberately feeling the betrayal of his hammering heart in the carotid arteries. With her thumbs against the pulses and her fingers curving to the back of his neck, she squeezed harder than was necessary, and the clever pressure dammed the hot blood beating turgidly in his already dizzy head.

Carter lowered his hands along her back to the curved slenderness of her waist; with the humid softness of her mouth parting to his kiss, he trembled a little and almost circled her waist with his hands as he took part of her weight in his arms. What a maddeningly sensuous body she had . . . and how she knew it!

She was too clever for Carter's peace of mind: if only she had wilted sweetly in his arms and closed her eyes . . . but no, those black eyes shone as she gauged the effect she had on him, and she bent back at the waist, until her mouth, retreating before his, only touched his in small, swift kisses, brushing him with

the heated surfaces of her lips. Her breasts might have been two little ghosts, so lightly did their boldly lifted rondures flick his chest. Finally, laughing, she blew a teasing little kiss between his parted, feverish lips and ducked away with averted face. She twisted firmly out of his arms and walked from him, toward his laboratory table.

Carter closed his eyes for an instant and exhaled with a shuddering breath. He was half maddened by the sudden firmation of their embrace. Then, for an entranced moment, he followed the contour of her hip as it shaped itself gracefully and with rhythmic shivers at every step. The capabilities of that knitted dress had been considered.

"Stay away from there," he ordered sharply.

She stretched a hand toward his notebook, heard the hissing of his breath, and shrugged. "After all, it's not your experiments I love, darling." She sat down in his chair and turned to face him, crossing her knees with a flourish that let her skirt fall above her stockings and wrinkle caressingly across the sleek perfection of her thighs. Her face was rosy now, and even the cream-textured skin above her stocking top was flushed alluringly. Bitterly, Carter stepped toward her. He wouldn't have put it past her to be able to blush from head to toe, at will. . . !

WHEN again he sat alone before the bubbling retort, his mind wandered. Shame at his weakness for Fran depressed him. He should leave women alone altogether, he thought; especially this one. If he kept at his work, if he integrated all his power to the focus of these experiments,—well, he knew he had it in him. Carter knew he was versatile.

The Wilburson committee didn't know

all his ideas. Military inventions, for instance. Selenium detonators, improved; radio controlled projectiles; the atom turbine. . . . Some day he'd perfect them, would work out his ideas practically.

And, like many another modern physicist, Carter was not the scoffing materialist of the nineteenth century. He had not confined himself to the test-tube, the spectrohelioscope, or atom-s m a s h i n g dreams. Carter knew things about the mind. He knew that telepathy existed, and it didn't seem strange to him. And in a little article, he had projected even stranger speculations about the time-space continuum and the basic one-ness of all life. The future, the past: branches of the same tree. . . . But the Wilburson committee didn't know about that article, because Carter was practical; he had used a pseudonym.

With a start, he remembered to check the progress of his experiment. But as he lifted his eyes to the retort, a weird sensation froze him motionless. The sun had lowered, but those refracted and reflected slivers of gold and greenish light still danced with the bubbling of the liquid. But the amber clarity was clouding, or it seemed so to Carter; contrarily, the light rays seemed to glow with suddenly magnified brilliance; the retort was growing immeasurably large.

A rhythmic, painful roaring beat in his whole being, and the swirl of liquid began to shape into a girl . . . a life-size girl of heavenly loveliness who smiled, who leaned toward him, whose voice became more audible as the rhythmic beating in his head made itself sensed as pain.

Watching her with intent and wondering eyes, Carter knew abruptly that she *was* bending toward him, that her voice was real. He reached for her hand, and she helped him sit up.

"You poor dear!" she said tenderly. Her hand stroking his forehead was like a touch of refreshing dew. "Your head must ache fearfully."

Carter didn't dare ask, "Why?" The agony in his head was quite palpable to him, though her touch seemed to be lessening it. But he didn't dare speak. Something remarkable had happened. Something wonderful, if it allowed him to remain close to this exquisite creature.

"Would you like a drink of water?"

THE possibilities of how a stiff measure of brandy might pick him up occurred to Carter, but he only said gently, "Yes, please."

As she left the room for the water, he had a chance to observe that he was wearing expensive silk pajamas, that the luxurious bed was in a sumptuously fitted room. The sleeve of the pajama jacket was monogrammed. Someone else's clothes? Not likely: "C. S." Carter Seton. . . .

He tried to ponder calmly. The pain in his head was subsiding rapidly. He said to himself slowly and thoughtfully, "This isn't a dream, and it's not a hallucination . . . it's something rather eerie, because I've never seen her before, and she called me by my name."

Slowly, cautiously, he found his feet. In a daze, he circled the room. There on a mantelpiece was his picture . . . his picture and with it, that of the girl who had just left him. They were together in the picture, their cheeks almost touching. No, certainly all this wasn't a dream, but if it wasn't a dream, what was it?

"Here." She was at his side again, with the glass of water. "Poor Carter." When he had drained the glass, she reached up and kissed him. "You'll be better now, sweet."

"Of course," Carter agreed, not know-

ing what he would be better *from*. But the soothing touch of this girl was enough to make him better from anything.

Suddenly she was sobbing and in his arms. "Oh, why did they have to *hit* you? Why couldn't they just steal what they wanted and leave you alone. You might have been killed . . . and your old invention isn't worth it. It's only made to kill people with, anyway."

Carter frowned a little, even as he kissed her tear-wet eyes. He wanted a better lead even than that. He only said, "I feel lots better."

The thrill of feeling her arms so familiarly about his neck, of feeling the intimate contact of her slim but exquisitely shaped young body, was a gift from heaven that he didn't intend to deny himself, however crazy all this might be.

Invention? Well, of course he was an inventor, but he was still working on that Wilburson Fellowship experiment; he hadn't got around, yet, to his best inventions, especially his military ideas. She must be crazy. Or maybe he was. Maybe he'd invented something and hadn't even known it himself.

PRESENTLY she pulled out of his arms. "You want to see this morning's paper? It has an account of what happened—on the front page."

"Yes, of course." A god-given opportunity to see what was what, in black and white.

He took the paper from her. "The *Ledger-Dispatch!*" he exclaimed.

"Of course, you read it every morning."

"But—" Carter, on second thought, decided not to go on. The *Ledger* and the *Dispatch*, he knew, were two separate papers. But everything else was cockeyed; why not this? The dateline

both explained and confused it all: May 17, 1943.

Nineteen forty-three! But of course it was nineteen thirty-seven. This was ridiculous. Still, it occurred to him, no more ridiculous than the existence of this rich man's house for his convenience, or that picture of himself and the girl . . . or the girl herself. But the paper might tell.

A two column spread in the center said that Carter Seton, prominent young inventor, had been slugged by burglars whom he had discovered in his study. Apparently they had wanted the designs to one of his military inventions, for plans had been scattered about, though none were missing.

A rhythmic, painful roaring beat in his whole being, and the swirl of liquid began to shape into a girl of heavenly loveliness. . . !



"How do they know none are missing?" Carter asked her.

"But darling, you said so yourself, just before you fainted! You said they were after your television-torpedo—and that you hadn't put it all on paper." She was staring at him wide-eyed. "You seem so . . . queer, honey. But," she touched his cheek gently, "of course it was that blow on the head. The doctor said you'd be all right."

"I feel better . . . better," Carter assured her, dazed. "How about—breakfast?" he asked doubtfully.

"It's ready. Want to dress? I'll meet you in the breakfast room."

She kissed him lightly and went out. Carter fingered the tender spot on the side of his head. Glanced at the paper again and closed his eyes. He was in the year nineteen forty-three; he was a famous and rich inventor, the master of a large and sumptuously furnished house, the possessor of a lovely young wife. Why, all this was something like what he might have described as his hope of the future back in—*now* in, he swore—in nineteen thirty-seven. His own future life. Well, it obviously was, and he was in some measure what he had hoped to be.

He must find out what it all meant, but it would be better to go cautiously, to feel his way, and do what was expected of him.

A CLOSET full of clothes led him automatically to get dressed. The suit fitted him as if tailored to him. Had been, no doubt, he reflected . . . or *would be*, in nineteen forty-three!

Chimes sounded at his elbow, chimes that he didn't connect with the telephone until they had sounded several times. A maid appeared in the doorway but turned away when she saw him lift the instrument (a strangely light and comfortable

thing to hold, he noted).

When finally he hung up, he hoped he had carried it off. He wasn't sure what all that had been said really meant. The caller evidently had been a person of authority in some school; a boys' school. He had been calling Mr. Seton to assure him that his son's grippe was nothing at all to worry about; that the boy would return to classes in a day or two.

So, Carter was staggered by the idea, he had a son! How old, he didn't know. And the boy's mother? Carter blushed hotly as he thought of the lovely creature who had kissed him. Apparently she was his wife. That meant . . . it meant that if this was a dream, it was okay by him!

CARTER was bothered by his not knowing what to call her. All during breakfast they were silent except for short remarks. She seemed worried.

"That Mrs. Perth—though I'm sure that's not her real name," the girl suddenly said, "is coming at eleven, you know. She just phoned before you came down. She'd heard about that awful thing that happened to you, she said, and she wanted to know if you were well enough to keep the appointment. I told her yes. You might as well get it over with, as long," she added bitterly, "as you think you must know more about her and why she's so interested in your work."

Carter mumbled, "Sorry . . . it won't take long." Now, who in hell was Mrs. Perth? He wondered. If people wanted his secrets enough to burglarize his home and knock him in the head, maybe other interests also cared enough to set a siren after him.

The siren description fitted down to the last subtle curve, he saw instantly when he greeted her. Mrs. Perth was probably about thirty, but it had taken a couple of hundred years of just the right

ancestors to give her a figure like that!

"How about that drive we agreed on," she almost whispered, as if they had a secret from the rest of the house, from the butler who was retiring, from Carter's wife, who had coldly refused to come down at all. "I've got my run-about."

Carter didn't look back as they scattered gravel on his driveway and hummed out to the road. He let his eyes take account of her, though, and she appreciated that with a little smile, though she kept her eyes on the road.

In fact, thought Carter, she might have dressed with the intention of having him take account of her. That sporty costume she was wearing . . . umm! Snug sweater moulding perfectly formed breasts and letting them shiver delightfully at each bounce or vibration of the car. An oyster gray flannel skirt, pleated and lying in fluted folds along the tapering lengths of her thighs. He could barely see the round of one silken knee, until she shifted a little closer to him and somehow made the skirt slide back into her lap.

She dropped her right hand beside him and steered with the other. Her fingers pressed his, and she let the springy curve of her right breast brush his arm. Glancing at her feet, he saw that short white socks gave an especially delicious intimacy to her trim ankles.

"Do you want to just drive?" she asked softly, "or shall we stop and take up our discussion where we left off?"

IF THIS snuggling act was a sample, Carter found his pulse heightening to think just where they had left off. When he didn't answer, she drove off the highway under a spreading tree. Instantly she was in his arms, had twisted and leaned back so that he had to support her yielding weight, and had turned her mouth to his.

Remembering the girl who was, or ought to be, his wife, Carter wasn't too eager; but he had to find out what all this was about! He kissed Mrs. Perth, felt her legs scrape against his knees as she slid closer, and began to pick up interest. When she pulled her mouth away from his, after a minute, she was breathless and her eyes shone brightly beneath artfully drooping, sooty lashes. If it was an act, it was a very pleasant one, well played.

"I tell you what, Mr.—Uh . . . Carter—" she whispered, to keep her secret from the spreading tree, "Why don't we go to the Chinese Falcon? We can discuss things more . . . privately."

Carter had yet to find out what they were discussing.

In the Chinese Falcon, he apparently knew the waiters. At least they knew him. The manager, though, appeared to be not Chinese, but Japanese. Carter vaguely remembered having been here once in his college days. Why, the thought staggered him, it was here he had met Fran! They'd thrown that party here. But where was Fran? Where was anybody he'd known?

Mrs. Perth nodded to the Japanese and Carter followed her up a little stairway without protest. They had drinks in a private room and they were good drinks. If there was danger in this association, Carter considered, it was going to be sprung on him in a more subtle way than by feeding him a Mickey.

They sat side by side on a leather lounge with the little table before them. Mrs. Perth drew his face to hers, yielded her scarlet lips with a smile that helped the kiss oddly.

She said evenly, after a minute of that spiced kiss, "Carter, darling, what happened last night only proves the danger of your holding onto that design. I know you haven't given or sold it to any com-

pany or government, and Villomar will give you a cool million dollars for the sole rights to the television-torpedo."

"Wait!" he ordered. He smothered her mouth again, and she smiled and accepted the idea. She was a woman with a mission; Carter was young and exciting.

BUT Carter wanted time for the flurry of ideas to settle. Villomar—that told him plenty! World's most notorious armament makers, that company was continually involved in intrigue and counter intrigue, playing one country against another, and had been known to betray both sides. But when a nation wants war machines, it pays and doesn't argue or look too closely at the honor of its merchant.

And the television-torpedo . . . why he must have perfected it! Yet he could not remember ever having worked on it beyond sketching the possibilities of a radio controlled torpedo with television screen, an instrument of battle that could be steered from the attacking ship . . . or from shore . . . as easily as though the operator were in the torpedo itself.

But his wife—what could her name be?—had told him he'd mentioned not having set down the full design on paper. Then the joke was on them, for Carter hadn't the slightest idea what he had worked out for the thing.

He wondered what she'd say if he told her the truth. He said, "I'm sorry, but I've lost the plans for that thing, and I don't remember just how to do them over."

"But that's ridiculous!" she exclaimed angrily. Then she laughed. "You're trying to string me along, aren't you? I know how to make you remember!" She was confident now that he would sell the design, but perhaps a million dollars didn't mean so much to a millionaire as

some other things! She could forgive that!

She caught the hem of her sweater with a sudden movement and pulled it over her head. Before he could stop her she had stepped out of her skirt and was plumped down into his lap dressed in nothing but filmy underthings and stockings and shoes.

Carter felt himself tremble despite his determination to get this woman out of the way and return to the big house and find out about things. He stared fascinated at her bare and trembling shoulders, at ample but firmly rounded cones of lightly clad flesh, faintly glossed by the dim light of the room.

Watching his gaze, she laughed huskily and surged up against him with an undulant movement that ended with her ripe and demanding lips parted for his kiss. Carter's arms tightened spasmodically about her supple form. Not taking her mouth away, she crossed one knee over the other with a movement that turned her a little more toward him.

CARTER didn't hear the key turn, the door open. The girl did. With a choked, breathless cry she leaped from his arms and snatched her clothes, backing away.

"Anna!" came the tense, low voice of the man at the door. He didn't have a gun in sight. He merely closed the door behind him and advanced toward them.

Carter laughed. "The old badger game, huh? You catch me and squeeze and I shell out. I suppose he's your husband, Mrs. Perth!"

"But he is!" The girl squealed. "You don't understand. Harry—where did you come from?"

"Never mind that. Thought I was a thousand miles away, didn't you? I've had my eye on you for weeks, and I

She had read part of his diary. "So you've found another girl, have you?" she asked bitterly.



don't give a damn who's paying you, I'll kill you for stuff like this. You dirty little tramp—!"

He grabbed her arm, twisted it behind her, and slapped her face, hard. The girl moaned, but she didn't cry out. "Harry!" she gasped. "I—I love you, believe me.

Get out, before they catch you! They'll kill you!"

"If anybody gets killed, it's you."

Carter took two steps and jerked the man's head back from behind. A right to the jaw. It was almost automatic, yet he wondered how it happened the man

hadn't shot him, hadn't expected some fight.

"Nicely done, Mr. Seton," came the suave voice of Loo Ming, the proprietor of the Chinese Falcon. Behind him as he entered, two small, lemon-skinned men stopped.

"Take this out." Loo touched the fallen man's unconscious form with his foot. The girl seemed scared now. "He's your husband?" She nodded.

"Please don't—kill him," she pleaded. Her voice trembled. She licked dry lips.

Loo Ming ignored her and addressed Carter: "I heard everything through our dictaphone arrangement, Mr. Carter. Let me assure you that we shall not hurt your wife if you are agreeable to the proposition put to you by your lovely companion."

"My wife!" Carter gasped. "Why you yellow rat—!" His hand shot toward Loo's throat, but Loo had already thrust forward the muzzle of a heavy Mauser automatic. Before Carter could make another move, he felt himself seized heavily from behind. Chloroform was filling his nostrils. . . .

"**F**LOWER, mister? Roses, two bits a dozen!" The boy's voice was half a giggle, and Carter, fighting the haze in his brain, knew—when he finally knew anything at all—that the boy thought he was drunk. Carter was slouched, half sitting, half lying, in a doorway. The place, he recognized in some surprise, was several blocks away from his laboratory. It was dark.

"Roses, mister?" The kid tugged at his sleeve.

Carter struggled to his feet. God, what an awful bat he must have been on! His head throbbed. "All right," he mumbled to the boy. He dug into his pocket and found some silver. "Keep it."

Carter tore off one rose from the

bunch and half consciously stuck it in his lapel. He shoved off for home; his rooms were behind the laboratory.

So groggy was his condition, that it was not until he tried the door and found it unlocked that it occurred to him that he couldn't remember any wild drinking parties; he couldn't even remember leaving the lab. He shook his head as he entered and switched on the light.

Carter stared at his notebook, lying on the desk; at the retort on the stand, with amber liquid still and cold within. The sight of that brought back in one white wave everything that had happened to him. He sank weakly into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

Carter Seton's Diary

May 12th, 1937: I've thought it all over . . . everything that's happened since I looked into that retort—how long ago? (It may have been yesterday, for this is yesterday's *Ledger*, here)—and I've decided not to leave this room until I duplicate that experiment. I *have* to get back to her somehow! They have her . . . the wife that will be mine six years from now . . . and I had to leave her just when she needed me!

Yes, I know what has happened. By some queer freak of my mind, while I was staring—into that retort yesterday, I was projected into the future! Into the future of my own life, six years hence. . . . And why not? In my article on the space time continuum and its possibilities I developed the thesis that a man may be projected into the past. Since all life is one, from the beginning of the lowest one-celled bit of slime till now, there's no reason why a man's mind, a bit of the cosmic life, could not find itself a thousand years in the past, or a million. There's also no reason why he should not find himself in the future; it has

happened before, I believe; certainly it has taken place in my case.

Why do I find myself back in the present? Is it because my life is destined to end when that chloroform is clamped to my nose? Shall I never have a chance to save that lovely creature who is to become my wife (how many years hence, I wonder?)

But I can't tell anyone about this. They'd think I was crazy—Fran and all the rest—if I told them I'd been living in my own future life! That I'd found in the year nineteen forty-three a girl lovely beyond imagination; that I actually was married to her and was a rich and famous inventor. They wouldn't believe such a thing could happen to me. They'd think I'd been dreaming, whereas actually, by some accident that I *must* duplicate, I've been given a glimpse into the secret of the co-existence of space and time . . . I've simply been projected into a different cross section of my own life!

CARTER didn't know how long he'd been writing there at his desk, using up his notebook beyond the notes on his experiment, when he swung around, startled.

"Fran! Can't you knock? You walk like a mouse!"

Her impudent, freckled nose wrinkled in a laugh of defiance. "I forgot something when I saw you this afternoon. So I came back, and when I found the door unlocked, I thought I'd just sort of sneak in and kiss you on the back of the neck . . . like *this!*" (So it had been this very afternoon! he thought.)

He couldn't stop her; in fact, he didn't seem able to make any resistance at all!

The warm nibbling of her lips back of his ear sent a chill of pleasure down his back; and that despite the fact that he was saying to himself: "Fran means

nothing to me now . . . not after the kiss of that other girl, my wife."

But then, he wouldn't meet the other girl until some time in the future! Nevertheless—oh! he must get rid of Fran; he must duplicate the conditions of that transformation that had wafted him into the future of six years hence.

Even now—though of course it couldn't be *now!*—but at this moment in the future, she might be suffering tortures at the hands of the armament gang.

Carter straightened and took the girl's arms from his neck.

"You don't love me any more?" She grinned confidently.

He must get rid of her. "Of course I love you," he assured her. "Here's a rose I got for you."

She took the rose and held it between their mouths during a kiss. He drew away and said, gasping: "I'll make some coffee. Then you must go. I've work to do."

"Work, work—always work and no love!" Her taunting voice followed him as he went toward his pantry. He made a thorough search. He'd known he was low on food. But there was not a single can. Nothing. Not even coffee.

When he returned, Fran's eyes were blazing, her mouth shaking in tremors of bitterness, of jealous hate. She had his notebook in her hands.

"Put that down!" he leaped forward and snatched the book. He had described in it everything that had happened.

"So you found another girl, did you? Fran means nothing to you beside her, is that it? Why you lousy—!"

DROPPING the notebook she flung the rose in his face and started for the door. Carter opened his mouth, took a step after her, then stopped.

(Continued on page 100)

ACROSS SIX YEARS

[Continued from page 67]

She turned. "You'll never see me again, never . . . never . . . !"

Let her go, thought Carter. She'd read part of his diary. But not enough to understand; though of course she wouldn't have understood anyway. Nobody would.

Suddenly Carter felt unutterably weary; his head began to ache. He dropped into the chair and stared at the notebook. Had it all been a dream?

The door again.

"Oh, Carter, darling! You're here! You're safe! Dr. Byrnes—he's here!"

The room whirled for Carter, but he recognized his wife—the girl of the future. She was real; her slim length of warm youth was beside him, her eager arms about him, her kisses on his face.

The gray haired little man who followed her into the room only said, "Good. Lucky we didn't find him dead in a sewer! Carter—are you all right?" Carter didn't know him.

IT TOOK more than a little while to make Carter understand even partly what had happened. Stroking his head, she explained: "I was suspicious of that Perth woman, especially after last night's burglary, so I had you followed. Had the police raid the Chinese Falcon. He was bluffing you when he threatened me, darling, because I was safe. It was *you* we were worried about. They smuggled you out before we got there. Somehow they suspected, and they must have just dumped you on the street."

"But this"—Carter waved his hand about dazedly. "My laboratory. Isn't this 1937? I haven't met you yet . . . I

love you, but I don't even know your name."

The girl and the doctor looked at each other. He whispered to her. She said gently, "My name is Mary, and I'm your wife."

She read his diary . . . the diary he had written in the brief time since Loo Ming's men had dumped him on the street and he had found his way here.

"Poor Carter!" she whispered. "It is 1943, darling, and you're not a poor struggling inventor: you're one of the most famous in the world! Don't you remember your short wave machines? Your radio planes? Even the television-torpedo they tried to steal from you? You think it's still 1937 because.

Well, you see, just before you met me, an explosion in the laboratory here destroyed your memory, and Doctor Byrnes and I kept it just as it had been that last day, bringing you here often, hoping the place would bring back what you'd forgotten.

"But it didn't, though you went ahead with your work after we were married. When that burglar hit you, it must have brought back all your past life, before the explosion—but at the same time blotted out the last six years, all that's happened *since* the explosion!"

Carter passed a hand across his forehead. He noticed now that the 1937 *Ledger* was age-yellowed; the equipment on his table was newer, slightly different from the old. They must have found out from the Wilburson people how it had been arranged.

"We came here earlier tonight, on the chance you might have come here, if you



Before he could stop her, she had stepped out of her skirt.

weren't d—dead . . . and we must have left it unlocked. We didn't really expect to find you, Carter, but oh! I'm so glad we did! You'll remember, after a while, what's happened during the last few years, but you're all right now, aren't you?"

"Of course . . . yes!" Carter kissed her. It seemed strange. He didn't remember having done it before the time when he'd wakened up and had breakfast with her.

MARY stared again at his diary. "Carter," she murmured in awe.

"You—you wrote this with your right hand—the way you used to write, before I persuaded you that you should write left-handed because you were born that way!"

Carter laughed shakily. "That's odd!" Oh, yes; part of it was explained: amnesia had simply wiped six years out of his consciousness and made him think it was back in 1937 . . . that his yesterday was a glimpse into the future. But there was something he couldn't tell Mary or

the Doctor. Something that puzzled him profoundly.

He couldn't tell them about Fran's visit a little while ago. They'd explain it away as the hallucinosis of an injured brain, but would they be right? Or *had* he been projected into the past for that few minutes? Into a past peopled by shades, by the past lives of the people he had known.

He paled when he remembered how Fran had read his diary, had left him in anger. He remembered the rose she had crushed and thrown in his face before

she had left, crying, "You'll never, never see me again. . . !"

Fearfully he looked down upon the floor. He stooped, picked up a rose whose petals were bruised, but not dried by time. Its fragrance lingered in his nostrils, and—was that a trace of Fran's perfume?

"Does this smell like, just a rose?" he asked, strainedly.

His wife, here in 1943, humored him. "It smells like a rose, a sweet one, to me. Where'd you get it?"

"It's just a flower," Carter said softly, "that I bought from a boy on the street."