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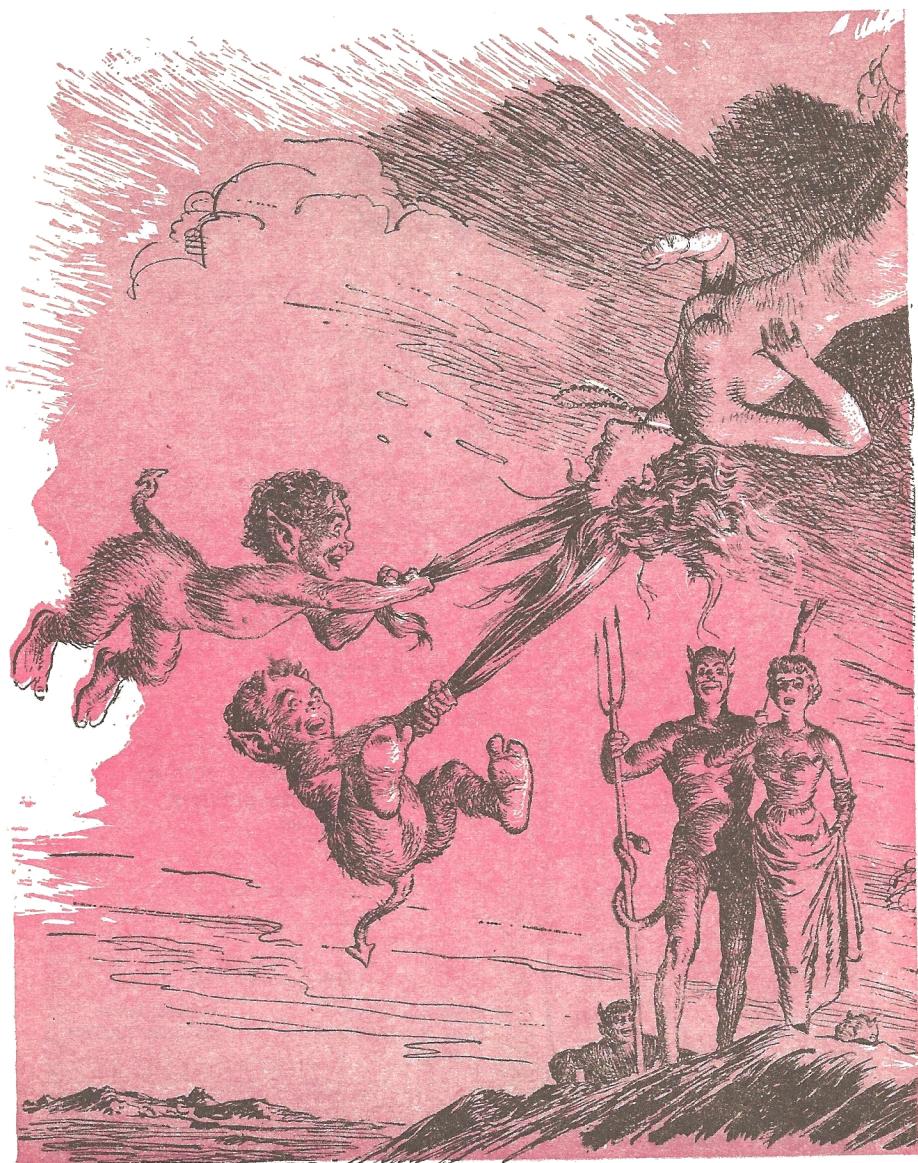
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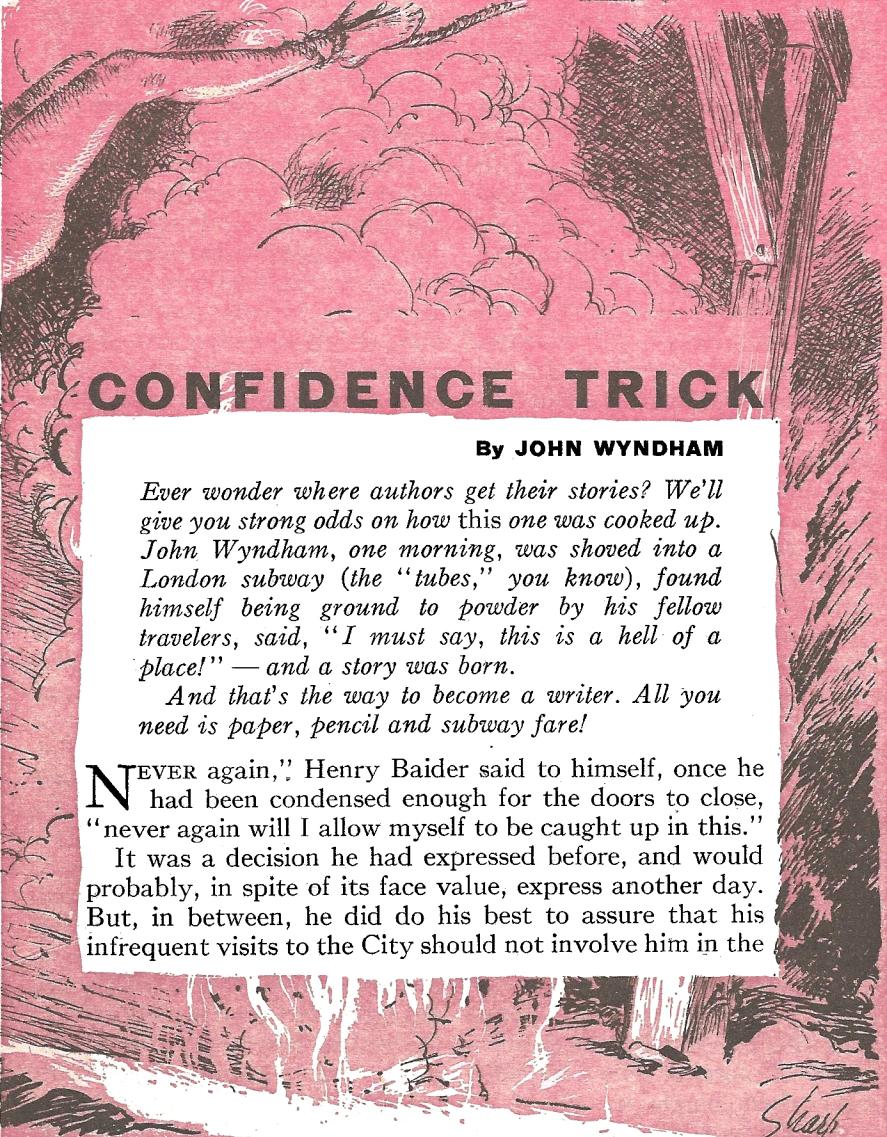
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CONFIDENCE TRICK

By JOHN WYNDHAM

Ever wonder where authors get their stories? We'll give you strong odds on how this one was cooked up. John Wyndham, one morning, was shoved into a London subway (the "tubes," you know), found himself being ground to powder by his fellow travelers, said, "I must say, this is a hell of a place!" — and a story was born.

And that's the way to become a writer. All you need is paper, pencil and subway fare!

NEVER again," Henry Baider said to himself, once he had been condensed enough for the doors to close, "never again will I allow myself to be caught up in this."

It was a decision he had expressed before, and would probably, in spite of its face value, express another day. But, in between, he did do his best to assure that his infrequent visits to the City should not involve him in the

Sheaf

rush hour. Today, however, already delayed by his business; he faced the alternatives of vexing his wife by delaying still further, or of allowing himself to be drawn into the flood that was being sucked down the Bank Station entrances. After looking unhappily at the moving mass and then at the unmoving bus queues, he had squared his shoulders. "After all, they do it twice a day and survive. Who am I —?" he said, and stepped stoutly forward.

The funny thing was that nobody else looked as if he or she thought it a sub-human, stock-yard business. They just waited blank-eyed, and with more patience than you would find in a stockyard. They didn't complain, either.

Nobody got out at St. Paul's though the increased pressure suggested that somebody had inexplicably got in. The doors attempted to close, drew back, presumably because some part of somebody was inexpertly stowed, tried again, and made it. The train drew heavily on.

The girl in the green mackintosh on Henry's right said to the girl in the blue mackintosh who was jammed against her: "D'you think you actually *know* when your ribs crack?" but on a philosophical note of fair comment rather than complaint.

Nobody got out at Chancery Lane, either. A lot of exhortation,

shoving and staggering achieved the impossible: somebody more was aboard. The train picked up speed slowly. It rattled on for a few seconds. Then there was a jolt and all the lights went out.

Henry swore at his luck as the train drew up, but then, almost the instant it had stopped, it started to pull again. Abruptly he discovered that he was no longer supported by the people round him, and flung out an arm to save himself. It struck something yielding. At that moment the lights came on again, to reveal that the object struck had been the girl in the green mackintosh.

"Who do you think you're —?" she began. Then her mouth stayed open, her voice failed, and her eyes grew rounder and wider.

At the same moment Henry had started to apologize, but his voice, too, cut out, and his eyes also bulged.

He looked up and down the coach that a moment ago had been jammed solid with people to the last inch. It now contained three others besides themselves. A middle-aged man who was opening his newspaper with an air of having been given his due at last; opposite him a woman, also middle-aged, and lost in contemplation; at the other end of the coach, in the last seat, sat a younger-looking man, apparently asleep.

"Well, really!" said the girl. "That Milly! Just wait till I see

her in the morning. She knows I have to change at Holborn, too. Getting off and leaving me without a word!" She paused. "It was Holborn, wasn't it?" she added.

Henry was still looking dazedly about him. She took hold of his arm and shook it.

"It was Holborn, wasn't it?" she repeated, uncertainly.

Henry turned to look at her, but still with a vagueness in his manner.

"Er . . . what was Holborn?" he asked.

"That last stop — where they all got out. It *must've* been Holborn, mustn't it?"

"I . . . er . . . I'm afraid I, don't know this line well," Henry told her.

"I do. Like the back of my hand. Couldn't be anywhere but Holborn," she said, with self-convincing firmness.

Henry looked up the swaying coach, past the rows of strap-handles emptily aswing.

"I . . . er . . . didn't see any station," he said.

Her head in its red knitted cap tilted further back to look up at him. Her blue eyes were troubled, though not alarmed.

"Of course there was a station — or where would they all go to?"

"Yes . . ." said Henry. "Yes, of course."

There was a pause. The train continued to speed along, swaying more and jerking more now on its lightly loaded springs.

"The next'll be Tottenham Court Road," said the girl, though with a touch of uneasiness.

The train rattled. She stared at the black windows, growing more pensive.

"Funny," she said, after a while. "Funny-peculiar, I mean."

"Look here," said Henry. "Suppose we go and have a word with those people up there. They might know something."

The girl glanced along. Her expression showed no great hopes of them, but: "All right," she said, and turned to lead the way.

Henry stopped opposite the middle-aged woman. She was dressed in a well-cut coat surmounted by a fur cape. An inch or two of veil fringed the round hat on her carefully dressed dark hair; her shoes, on the end of almost invisible nylon stockings, were black patent-leather with elegant heels; both her gloved hands rested on the black leather bag on her lap as she sat in absent contemplation.

"I beg your pardon," said Henry, "but could you tell us the name of the last station — the one where all the other people got out?"

The lids rose slowly. The eyes regarded him through the fringe

of veil. There was a pause during which she appeared to consider the several reasons which could have led such a person as Henry to address her, and to select the most becoming. Henry decided that no-longer-young was perhaps more apposite than middle-aged.

"No," she said, with a slight smile which did not touch the matter. "I'm afraid I didn't notice."

"It didn't strike you that there was anything . . . odd about it?" Henry suggested.

The lady's well-marked eyebrows rose slightly. The eyes pondered him on two or three levels.

"Odd?" she inquired.

"The way they all went so very quickly," he explained.

"Oh, was that unusual?" said the lady. "It seemed to me a very good thing; there were far too many of them."

"Quite," agreed Henry, "but what is puzzling us is how it happened."

The eyebrows rose a little higher. "Really. I don't think I can be expected to —"

There was a harrumph noise, and a rustling of newspaper behind Henry. A voice said: "Young man. It doesn't seem to me to be necessary for you to bother this lady with the matter. If you have any complaints, there are proper channels for them."

Henry turned. The speaker was a man with graying hair, and a

well-trimmed moustache set on a pinkly healthy face. He was aged perhaps fifty-five and dressed *City-comme-il-faut* from black Homburg to dispatch case. At the moment he was glancing interrogatively towards the lady, and receiving a small, grateful smile in return. Then his eyes met Henry's. His manner changed slightly; evidently Henry was not quite the type that his back view had suggested.

"I am sorry," Henry told him, "but this young lady may have missed her station. Besides, it does seem rather odd."

"I noticed Chancery Lane, so the rest must have got out at Holborn — that is obvious, surely," said the man.

"But they went so quickly."

"A good thing too. The people in charge must have found some new method of handling the traffic. They're always developing new ideas and techniques, you know — even under public ownership."

"But we've been going on for nearly ten minutes, non-stop, since then, and we've certainly not passed a station," Henry objected.

"Probably been re-routed. Technical reasons, I expect," said the man.

"Re-routed! On the underground?" protested Henry.

"My dear fellow, it's not my job to know how these things

work — nor yours, I take it. We have to leave it to those who do. That's what they're there for, after all. Take it from me, they know what they're up to, even though it may seem 'odd,' as you call it, to us. God bless me, if we don't have faith in our expert authorities, where are we?"

Henry looked at the girl in the green mackintosh. She looked back at him. She shrugged slightly. They went and sat down, further up the coach. Henry glanced at his watch, offered her a cigarette, and they both lit up.

The train rattled along to a steady rhythm. Both of them watched the windows for the sight of a lighted platform, but they could see no more than their own reflections against outside blackness. When there was no more of the cigarette to hold, Henry dropped the remains on the floor and ground it out. He looked at his watch again, then at the girl.

"More than twenty minutes," he said. "That's impossibility, raised several powers."

"It's going faster now, too," the girl observed. "And look at the way it's tilted."

Henry regarded the hanging straps. There could be no doubt that they were running down an appreciable incline. Glancing forward, he saw that the other couple was now in quite animated conversation.

"Shall we try them again?" he suggested.

"— never more than fifteen minutes, even in the rush hour. Absolutely never," the lady was saying as they came up. "I'm afraid my husband will be so worried about me."

"Well?" inquired Henry, of the man.

"Certainly very unusual," the other conceded.

"Unusual! Nearly half an hour at full bat without a station? It's absolutely impossible," said Henry.

The other regarded him coldly.

"It is clearly *not* impossible because it is being demonstrated right now. Very likely this is some underground escape-route from London that they constructed during the war, and we have been switched on to it in error. I have no doubt that the authorities will presently discover the mistake and bring us back."

"Taking them a long time," said the girl. "Due home before this, I am. And I got a date at the Pallay this evening."

"We'd better stop the train," said the lady. Her eyes were on the handle, with its notice that threatened £5 for improper use.

Henry and the other man looked at one another.

"Well, if this isn't an emergency, what is?" demanded the lady.

"Er . . ." said Henry.

"The authorities —" the other began.

"All right," she announced. "If you men are afraid to touch it, I'm not." She reached up, took firm hold of the handle, and yanked it down.

Henry dropped into a seat quickly, pulling the girl down too before the brakes should go on.

The brakes did not go on.

They sat waiting. Presently it became a fair bet that the brakes were not going to go on. The lady pushed the handle up impatiently and pulled it down again. Nothing happened. She expressed her opinion of it.

"Cor! Listen to her! Did you ever?" said the girl beside Henry.

"Fluent. Have another cigarette," said Henry.

The train clattered and swayed along, the straps still hanging with a forward slant.

"Well," said the girl, after a time, "this properly dishes my date at the Pallay all right. Now that Doris'll get him. D'you think I could sue them?"

"I'm afraid not," Henry told her.

"You a lawyer?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, yes. Suppose we introduce ourselves. It looks as if we shall have to spend some time here, whatever they do. I'm Henry Baider."

"Mine's Norma Palmer," said the girl.

The City man said: "Robert Forkett," and nodded slightly to them.

"Barbara Branton — Mrs., of course," said the lady.

"What about him?" asked Norma, pointing to the man at the far end of the coach. "D'you think we ought to wake him, and tell him?"

"I don't fancy it would help much," said Mr. Forkett. He turned to Henry. "I understood you to say you were a legal man, sir. Perhaps you can tell us just what our position is in this matter?"

"Well, speaking without my references," Henry told him, "I should say that in the matter of delay, no claim by us would lie. I think we shall find that the Company only undertakes to provide . . ."

Half an hour later he became aware of a weight pressing lightly against him. Looking round, he found that Norma had gone to sleep with her head on his shoulder. Mrs. Branton, on the other side, had also dozed off. Mr. Forkett yawned and apologized.

"Might as well all have a nap to pass the time, though," he suggested.

Henry looked at his watch once more. Practically an hour and a half now. Unless they had been going in a closed circle, they must have passed beneath several counties by this time. The thing



remained incomprehensible.

To reach a cigarette he would have had to disturb the girl, so he remained as he was, looking at the blackness outside, swaying slightly to the train's motion, listening to the ti-tockety-tock, ti-tockety-tock, ti-tockety-tock, of the hurrying wheels until his head drooped sideways and rested on the knitted cap on his shoulder.

The change of rhythm, the slight shuddering from the brakes brought Henry awake; the rest stirred a moment later. Mr. Forkett yawned audibly. Norma opened her eyes, blinked at the unexpected scene, and discovered the situation of her head. She sat up. "Well, I never," she said, regarding Henry. He assured her it had been a pleasure. She began to pat her hair and correct herself according to her reflection in the still dark window opposite. Mrs. Branton reached under her cape and consulted a fob-watch.

"Nearly midnight. My husband'll be quite frantic."

The sounds of slowing continued to descend the scale. Presently the windows ceased to be altogether black; a light, rather pinkish compared with the lamps inside, started to show, and gradually to grow stronger.

"That's better," said Norma. "I always hate this tunnel."

The light grew brighter still, the speed dwindled, and presently they were running into a station. They leaned forward to catch the name, but could see no plate on the wall. Mrs. Branton, on the other side, suddenly craned across.

"There!" she said. They turned quickly; but not soon enough.

"It was something Avenue, or Avenue something," she said.

"Well, we'll soon find out now," Mr. Forkett reassured them.

The train drew up, with a sigh from the braking system, but the doors did not open at once. There

was a sound of echoing commotion further along the platform, out of which voices presently distinguished themselves calling: "All change!" — "End of the line!" — "All out here!"

"All very well — all change, indeed!" murmured Norma, getting up and moving towards the doors.

The others followed her. Quite suddenly the doors ran back. Norma gave one look at the figure standing on the platform.

"Ee-ow!" she yelped, and backed violently into Henry.

The figure wore little clothing. What there was seemed to be chiefly straps holding appurtenances, so that it was revealed as angularly male, in a rich mahogany red. Ethnologically, perhaps, the face might have been North American Indian, only instead of feathers it wore a pair of horns. Its right hand carried a trident; its left dangled a net.

"All out!" it said, moving a little aside.

Norma hesitated, then scuttled past it. The others followed warily but more sedately, and joined her on the platform. The creature leant into the open doorway, and they were able to observe his back view. The tail was waving with a slow, absent-minded kind of motion. The barb at the end of it looked viciously sharp.

"Er . . ." began Mr. Forkett.

Then he changed his mind. He cast a speculative eye on each of his companions in turn, and pondered.

The creature caught sight of the sleeper at the other end of the car. He walked down and prodded him with his trident. There was some inaudible altercation. The creature prodded a few more times, and presently the man came out to join them, with the sleep not yet out of his eyes.

There was a shout higher up the platform, followed by a sound of running feet. A tough-looking young man came sprinting towards them. A net whistled after him and entangled him so that he fell and rolled over and over. A hearty shout of laughter came from the other end of the platform.

Henry glanced about. The dim rosy light was strong enough for him to see and read the station's nameplate.

"Something Avenue!" he repeated under his breath. "Tch-tch!"

Mrs. Branton overheard him, and looked at it.

"Well, if that doesn't spell 'Avenue,' what does it spell?" she demanded.

Before he could reply a voice began to call: "This way out! This way out!" and the creature motioned them on, with its trident at the ready. The young man from the other end of the coach

walked next to Henry. He was a large, forceful, intellectual-looking young man, but still not quite clear of the mists of sleep.

"What is all this nonsense about?" he said. "Collecting for the hospitals or something? No excuse for it, now we've got the Health Scheme."

"I don't think so," Henry told him, "in fact, I'm afraid it doesn't look too good." He indicated the station nameplate. "Besides," he added, "those tails—I don't see how it could be done."

The young man studied the sinuous movements of one of the tails.

"But really . . .!" he protested.

"What else?" inquired Henry. Altogether, and exclusive of the staff, there were about a dozen people collected at the barrier. They were passed through one by one while an elderly demon in a small hutch checked them off on a list. Henry learnt that the large young man was entered as Christopher Watts, physicist.

Beyond the barrier was an escalator of a somewhat antiquated type. It moved slowly enough for one to read the advertisements at the sides: preponderantly they offered specifics for burns, cuts, abrasions and bruises, with here and there the recommendation of a particular tonic or pick-me-up.

At the top stood an ill-used looking demon with a tray of tin boxes suspended against his chest. He was saying monotonously: "All guaranteed. Best quality." Mr. Forkett who was in front of Henry caught sight of the card on the tray, and stopped abruptly. The lettering ran:

FIRST-AID KITS COMPLETE
each

£1 or \$1.50 (U.S.)

"That's an insult to the pound," Mr. Forkett announced indignant.

The demon looked at Mr. Forkett. He thrust his face forward aggressively. "So what?" he demanded.

Pressure of those behind pushed Mr. Forkett on, but he moved reluctantly, murmuring about the necessity for confidence, stability and faith in sterling.

After crossing a hall they passed into the open. There was a faint tang of sulphur in the air. Norma pulled on the hood of her mackintosh against the light drizzle of cinders. Trident-bearers shepherded them round to the right, into a wire-netted enclosure. Three or four demons followed in with them. The last paused to speak to the guard on the gate.

"Heaven's harps, is that celestial bus behind time again?" he asked resentfully.

"Is it ever *on* time nowadays?" the gate demon asked.

"Never used to have these

holdups when the old man was running his ferry," grumbled the guard.

"Individual enterprise, that was," said the gate demon, with a shrug.

Henry joined the others who were surveying the scene. The view to the right was rugged and extensive, though smoky. Far away, at the end of a long valley, could be seen a brightly glowing area in which large bubbles formed, rose slowly, and took tantalizingly long to burst. To the left of it a geyser of flame whooshed up intermittently. At the back right a volcano smoked steadily, while little streams of red hot lava trickled down from its rim. In the middle distance the valley walls narrowed in two towering crags. The one on the left bore the illuminated sign: TRY HOOPER'S HIDEHARD. The other proclaimed: UNBURN IS THE ANSWER.

A little short of the right-hand crag, on the level valley floor, was a square encampment surrounded by several fences of barbed wire, and overlooked by a guard tower at each corner. Every now and then a string of flaming arrows would fly tracer-like into the compound from one of the towers, and the sound of howls mixed with demonic laughter would be borne faintly on the sulphurous breeze. From that point

one was able to follow the road as it wound up arid past them to the station entrance. A building opposite the station appeared to be a barracks where demons were queueing up to sharpen their tridents and touch up their tail-barbs on a grindstone in the yard. The whole thing struck Henry as somewhat conventional.

Almost opposite their netted enclosure was a kind of gibbet. It was occupied at the moment by a lady with nothing on who was hanging suspended upside down from chains round her ankles while a couple of junior demons swung on her hair. Mrs. Branton searched in her bag, and found a pair of spectacles.

"Dear me! Surely not . . ." she murmured. She looked more carefully. "So difficult to tell that way up, and with the tears running into her hair. I'm afraid it is, though. Such a nice woman, I always thought, too."

She turned to the nearest demon. "Did she commit a murder, or something dreadful?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "She just nagged at her husband so that he would find another woman and she would be able to divorce him for the alimony."

"Oh," said Mrs. Branton, a little flatly. "Is that all? I mean, there must have been something more serious, surely?"

"No," said the guard.

Mrs. Branton remained thoughtful. "Does she have to do a lot of that?" she asked, with a trace of uneasiness.

"Wednesdays," said the guard. "She does other things other days."

"Pss-t!" a voice hissed suddenly in Henry's ear. One of the guard demons beckoned him aside.

"Want to buy a bit of the real stuff?" inquired the demon.

"What stuff?" Henry asked.

The demon brought his hand out of his pouch. He opened it and showed a metal tube which looked as if it might contain toothpaste. He leant closer.

"The goods, this is. Best analgesic cream on the whitemarket. Just rub it on every time before tortures — you'll not feel a thing."

"No, thank you. As a matter of fact, I think they'll probably find there's been a mistake in my case," Henry told him.

"Come off it, chum," said the demon. "Look. I'll take a couple of pounds — special to you, that is."

"No thanks," said Henry.

The demon frowned. "You'd better," he advised, shifting his tail into a threatening position.

"Well — one pound," said Henry.

The demon looked a little surprised. "Okay. It's yours," he said, and handed it over.

When Henry rejoined the group, he found most of them watching three demons exuberantly chasing an extensive, pink middle-aged man up the opposite mountain-side. Mr. Forkett, however, was reviewing the situation.

"The accident," he said, raising his voice a little to contend with the increased lowing of sinners in the concentration camp, "the accident must have occurred between Chancery Lane and Holborn stations, that's fairly clear, I think. What is not at all clear to me, however, is why *I* am *here*. Undoubtedly, there has been a departmental error in my case which I hope will be rectified soon." He looked speculatively at the rest. Everyone became thoughtful.

"It'd have to be a *big* thing, wouldn't it?" asked Norma. "I mean, they wouldn't send a person here for a little thing like a pair of nylons, would they?"

"Well, if it was only *one* pair of nylons —" Henry was beginning, but he was cut short by an exclamation from Mrs. Branton. Following her gaze, he saw a woman coming down the street in a magnificent fur coat.

"Perhaps this place has another side to it that we've not seen yet," she suggested hopefully. "After all, where there are mink coats —"

"She doesn't look very pleased with it, though," Norma re-

marked, as the woman came closer.

"Live minks. Very sharp teeth," observed one of the demons, helpfully.

There was a sudden, startling yelp behind them. They turned to observe the dark young man, Christopher Watts, in the act of twisting a demon's tail. The demon yelped again, and dropped the tube of analgaesic cream it had been offering him. It attempted a stab with its trident.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Mr. Watts, skillfully avoiding the thrust.

He caught the trident by the shaft and wrenched it out of the demon's hand. "Now!" he said with satisfaction. He dropped the trident and laid hold of the tail with both hands. He swung the demon twice round his head and let go. The demon flew over the wire-netting fence and landed in the road with a yell and a bump. The other demons deployed and began to advance upon Mr. Watts, tridents levelled, nets swinging in their left hands.

Christopher Watts squared up to them, grimly watching them come on. Then, suddenly, his expression changed. His frown gave place to a smile. He unclenched his fists and dropped his hands to his sides.

"Dear me, what nonsense all this is!" he said, and turned his back on the demons.

They stopped abruptly and looked confused.

A surprising sense of revelation came over Henry. He saw quite clearly that the young man was right. It was nonsense. He laughed at the bewildered look on the demons' faces, and heard Norma beside him laughing too. Presently, all the party was laughing at the discomfited demons who looked first apprehensive, then sheepish.

Mr. Christopher Watts strode across to the side of the enclosure which faced up the valley. For some moments he regarded the smoky, luridly somber view. Then: "I don't believe it!" he said quietly.

An enormous bubble rose and burst in the fiery lake. There was a *woomph!* as the volcano sent up a mushroom cloud of smoke and cinders, and spilt better, brighter streams of lava down its sides. The ground trembled a little under their feet. Mr. Watts drew a deep breath.

"*I DON'T BELIEVE IT!*" he said loudly.

There was a loud crack. The dizzy crag which bore the recommendation for UNBURN split off and toppled slowly into the valley. Demons on the mountain side dropped their hunting, and started to lop homewards with cries of panic. The ground shook violently. The fiery lake began to empty into a huge split which had

opened in the valley floor. A tremendous gush of flame burst from the geyser. The mighty crag on the other side heeled over. There was a roaring and a crashing and a hissing of steam all around them, and through it Mr. Watts' voice bawled again:

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT!!!"

Suddenly, all was quiet, as if it had been switched off. All was black, too, with nothing whatever to be seen but the lighted windows of the train where it stood on the embankment behind them.

"Well," said Mr. Watts, on a note of cheerful satisfaction. "Well, that's that. Now let's go home again, shall we?" And by the light from the train windows he began to scramble up the embankment.

Henry and Norma moved to follow him. Mr. Forkett hesitated.

"What's the matter?" Henry asked him, looking back.

"I'm not sure. I feel it's not quite . . . not quite . . ."

"You can't very well stay here now," Henry pointed out.

"No — no, I suppose not," Mr. Forkett admitted and, half-reluctantly, he too began to climb the embankment.

Without any spoken agreement, the five who had previously travelled together again chose a coach to themselves. They had scarcely got aboard when the doors closed

and the train began to move. Norma sighed with relief and pushed her hood back as she sat down.

"Like being halfway home already," she said. "Thank you ever so much, Mr. Watts. It's been a real lesson to me, it has, though. I'll never go near a stocking counter again, never — except when I'm going to buy some."

"I'll second that — the thanks part, I mean," said Henry. "I still feel that there was very likely some confusion between the legal and the common view in my particular case, but I'm extremely obliged to you for . . . er . . . cutting the red tape."

Mrs. Branton held out a gloved hand to Mr. Watts. "Of course, you'll realize that it was all a stupid mistake that I should be there, but I expect you've saved me hours and hours of dealing with ridiculous officials. I do hope you may be able to come and dine with us some time. I'm sure my husband will want to thank you personally."

There was a pause. It lengthened. Gradually the realization that Mr. Forkett was not taking his cue drew all their eyes upon him. He himself was gazing in a pensive way at the floor. Presently he looked up, first at them, and then at Christopher Watts.

"No," he said. "I am sorry, but I cannot agree. I am afraid I must continue to regard your ac-

tion as anti-social, if not actually subversive."

Mr. Watts, who had been looking rather pleased with himself, showed first surprise, then a frown.

"I beg your pardon?" he said with genuine puzzlement.

"You've done a very serious thing," Mr. Forkett told him. "There simply cannot be any stability if we do not respect our institutions. You, young man, have destroyed one. We all had confidence in this affair — even you, to begin with — then you suddenly go and break it all up, an institution of considerable standing, too. No, I really cannot be expected to approve of that."

The rest of them stared at him.

"But Mr. Forkett," said Norma, "surely you wouldn't rather be back there, with all those demons and things?"

"My dear young lady, that is scarcely the point," Mr. Forkett reproved her. "As a responsible citizen, I must strongly oppose anything that threatens to undermine public confidence. Therefore, I must regard this young man's action as dangerous; verging, I repeat, upon the subversive."

"But if an institution is phony —" began Mr. Watts.

"That too, sir, is beside the point. If enough people believe in an institution, then it is important to those people — whether it

is what you call phony or not."

"You prefer faith to truth?" said Mr. Watts scornfully.

"You must have confidence, and if you have that, truth follows," said Mr. Forkett.

"As a scientist, I consider you quite immoral," said Mr. Watts.

"As a citizen, I consider you unscrupulous," said Mr. Forkett.

"Oh, dear!" said Norma.

Mr. Forkett pondered. Mr. Watts frowned.

"Something that is *real* isn't going to fall to bits just because I disbelieve in it," observed Mr. Watts.

"How can you tell? The Roman Empire was real enough once — as long as people believed in it," replied Mr. Forkett.

The argument continued for some little time, with Mr. Forkett growing more monumental, and Mr. Watts more fundamental.

Finally Mr. Forkett summed up his opinion: "Frankly, your iconoclastic, revolutionary views seem to me to differ only in name from bolshevism."

Mr. Watts rose to his feet. "The consolidation of society on faith, irrespective of scientific truth, is the method of a Stalin," he observed, and withdrew to the other end of the car.

"Really," said Norma, "I don't know how you can be so rude and ungrateful to him. When I think of them all with their toasting forks, and that poor

woman hanging there without a stitch on, and upside-down, too —”

“It was all quite appropriate to the time and place. He's a very dangerous young man,” said Mr. Forkett firmly.

Henry thought it time to change the conversation. The four of them chatted more generally as the train rattled on at a good speed, though not as fast as it had descended. But after a time the talk began to wilt. Glancing up the coach, Henry noticed that Mr. Watts had already gone to sleep again, and felt that there was no better way of spending the time.

He awoke to hear voices shouting: “Stand clear of the doors!” and to find that the carriage was full of people again. Almost as his eyes opened, Norma's elbow stuck into his ribs.

“Look!” she said.

The straphanger in front of them was interested in the racing part of his paper, so that the front page faced them with the headline: RUSH-HOUR TUBE SMASH — 12 DEAD. Under it was a column of names. Henry leaned forward to read them. The holder of the paper lowered it to glare indignantly, but not before Henry had noticed his own name and those of the others.

Norma looked troubled.

“Don't know *how* I'm going to

explain that at home,” she said.

“You get my point?” inquired Mr. Forkett on Henry's other side. “Just think of the trouble there's going to be straightening this out — newspapers, coroners, heaven knows what. Not a safe fellow to have about. Quite anti-social.”

“I don't know what my husband is going to think. He's such a jealous man,” remarked Mrs. Branton, not without satisfaction.

The train stopped at St. Paul's, thinned somewhat, and then went on. Mr. Forkett and Norma prepared to get out. It occurred to Henry that he might as well get out, too. The train slowed.

“Don't know what they're going to say in the office, seeing me walk in. Still, it's been ever so int'resting, really. Ta-ta for now, everyone,” said Norma, and wriggled into the departing crowd with the skill of long practice.

A hand grasped Henry's arm as they stepped on to the platform. “There he is,” said Mr. Forkett. He nodded ahead. Henry saw the back view of Mr. Watts preceding them up the platform. “Can you spare a few minutes? Don't trust the fellow at all.”

They followed up the escalator and round to the steps which brought them to the surface in front of the Royal Exchange.

There, Mr. Watts paused and
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looked around him, seeming to consider. Then his attention fixed itself on the Bank of England. He strode forward in a forceful manner and came to a stop facing the Bank, looked up. His lips moved.

The ground shook slightly underfoot. Three windows fell out of one of the Bank's upper storeys. One statue, two urns, and a piece of balustrading swayed and toppled. Several people screamed.

Mr. Watts squared his shoulders and took a deep breath.

"Good heavens! He's—" began Mr. Forkett, but the rest was lost as he sped from Henry's side.

"I—" announced Mr. Watts, at the top of his voice.

"DON'T—" he went on, to the accompaniment of an ominous

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trembling of the ground.

"BE—" but at that moment a strong push between his shoulder-blades thrust him full in the path of a hurtling bus.

There was a shriek of brakes applied too late.

"That's 'im! I sore 'im do it!" screamed a woman, pointing at Mr. Forkett.

Henry caught up with him just as a policeman came running.

Mr. Forkett was regarding the façade of the Bank with pride.

"No telling what might have happened. A menace to society, that young man," he said. "They ought to give me a medal, but I'm afraid they're more likely to hang me. After all, tradition must be observed."