

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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A Complete Bud Gregory Novelet

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By WILLIAM FITZGERALD

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Perched in the driver's seat of the old wooden ox cart, two mules were driving four men

# Donkeys to Bald Pate

By SAMUEL MINES

*When Professor Weedlemeyer gave a pair of mules some human intelligence, it almost made a jackass of him!*

**P**ROFESSOR WEEDLEMEYER sputtered in his eagerness, making large gestures with his hands.

"Of course!" he shouted, his accent becoming thicker with his excitement. "It is lunacy to think only man will increase in his intelligence! Animals will too—ya, und insects! It will be a fierce competition for the earth be—man and the animals!"

Jon Egan, science reporter and man of all work for the *Carolina Bugle*, yawned and searched vainly through littered pockets for a cigarette that wasn't there. He had heard all this before.

"Wish you'd do something about my dog

Spurious," he muttered. "He is the dumbest—"

"Stop annoying me with that fool hound!" Professor Weedlemeyer said crossly. He lifted his voice in a bellow. "Myrtle! Myrtle—where is the beer?"

Jon Egan brightened. The swinging door to the kitchen was opened by a foot, and a tray with beer glasses and bottles came through, followed by Myrtle Weedlemeyer, the professor's daughter.

Draw no hasty conclusions from the unfortunate name, product of absent-minded and uneclectic parental haste. Myrtle Weedlemeyer was as beautiful as the sun.

She was tall, with a magnificent lush body whose curves were a constant threat to the flimsy material seeking to restrain them.

She had gleaming black hair falling in smooth waves to a pair of wondrously formed shoulders. She had an oval face with skin as lambent as pearl and, as a final touch, a pair of huge, incredible blue eyes that were alight with internal fires.

She crossed the room, balancing the tray of drinks effortlessly, and the fluid motion of her body made Jon Egan's breath stop in his throat. As happened every time he saw this, he realized all over again that the reason he came out here was to see her, not to listen to the Professor's perpetual monolog on I.Q.

"... man of the future," Weedlemeyer was droning, "will undoubtedly a large, bulging crown have—hairless of course—und his jaws will shrink in proportion."

Myrtle sat down on the divan across from Egan, crossed sleekly rounded legs and turned the full voltage of her eyes on the newspaper man. He shuddered, downed half a glass of beer in a frenzied gulp that backfired and nearly choked him to death.

When he came out of the red fog of coughing, Myrtle sat beside him patting him on the back. The warmth of her closeness and the fragrant scent of her sent his blood pressure soaring.

"Let's go to the movies," he mumbled, catching her hand and getting up.

"Goody."

She snuggled against him. Professor Weedlemeyer regarded them sourly.

"I think I take back what I said about the intelligence of humans," he grumbled. "Movies—when science offers you the world! Bah, less intelligence than donkeys you have."

"You keep the science, daddy," Myrtle said generously. "I'll do better with what I have."

She turned her eyes on Egan again and the reporter, feeling his bones begin to soften like butter, agreed with no mental reservations.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth is an ungrateful child!" Weedlemeyer groaned. "I tell you, I bet I could take a cat—a donkey—and make him smarter as you two!"

"Yeh? How?" Egan said.

"A nice question." Weedlemeyer's eyes went thoughtful. "Of course the brain is not so highly convoluted. In generations, of

course—but there is no time." A new thought struck him. "Suppose an animal were suddenly to have the mind and the thoughts of a man. What would he do?"

"I am reminded of a story," Egan said, grinning. "A donkey was lost and nobody could find him. Then the village half-wit appeared, leading the beast."

"I know!" Weedlemeyer snapped. "You too could imagine yourself a donkey—without trouble. So to the movies go—donkeys!"

Giggling inanely, they pattered off.

**I**N TEN minutes Egan had forgotten the conversation. In two weeks it had faded, it seemed, forever from his consciousness. The professor, of course, continued his interminable monologue on intelligence.

"... not only the learning ability," he would drone earnestly, pounding it home with a pudgy fist, "but sagacity—the ability to apply what is learned. How many absent-minded professors do you know who have memorized the encyclopedia, but who cannot fix a leaking hot water bottle? They lack sagacity—they cannot apply their learning!"

But Jon Egan was much too much taken up with the gorgeous Myrtle to be amused by Professor Weedlemeyer's mutterings. He was running a constant fever and his hard-shelled bachelordom was crumbling under the oxy-acteylene flame of her incredible feminine appeal.

As competition, of course, he had only the entire campus—the male portion of it—plus a goodly number of the younger faculty members. But with rare judgment, or the ability to spot a dying duck when she saw one, Myrtle seemed actually to favor him. Amazing girl!

She kissed him on the porch swing, she held his hand in the movies, she murmured low into his ear.

"I hate my name. Myrtle Weedlemeyer—ugh! Sounds like something you spray on lawns."

Jon Egan gulped. He plunged.

"Why don't you change it?" he trembled. "Myrtle Egan sounds pretty nice."

"Darling!" said Myrtle.

The kiss she gave him topped all known scorch records and reduced him to a throbbing cinder. So, engaged officially, they went hand in hand to seek Papa Weedlemeyer and break the news.

They found him peering myopically

through a comparison microscope.

"So?" he grunted. "Am I supposed to be surprised? Any donkey could have seen it coming long ago. You will all the time fight and be perfectly happy and miserable. Now away go and talk your foolishness and let me work."

The roseate daze in which Myrtle and Egan were now enveloped left no room for curiosity about the nature of Professor Weedlemeyer's work. So it came to them with as much a shock as it did to anyone else when it finally happened.

They were returning from the movies, strolling hand in hand, this warm spring night. Jasmine and magnolia were in full, fragrant bloom and the night air was alive with romance. On a street corner a political meeting was in full progress. Senator Foghorn was running for re-election. The senator was speaking in a quiet voice which could not be heard for more than three miles.

"... to perpetuate our gr-r-e-a-a-t form of government and our gr-r-e-a-a-t Constitution, the most perfect political work ever handed down to mankind by Almighty God. Anybody who dares to change one word of that sacred document is a traitor to the ideals of our gr-r-e-a-a-t country, to our magnificent boys who fought and gave their lives and to the flower of our lovely womanhood, the wives and mothers and sisters of all of us. . . ."

The senator could go on like this indefinitely, saying nothing with unsurpassed volume and untiring energy. Myrtle and Egan heard him as they left the movie house and his voice grew in volume as they drew closer to the street corner meeting.

". . . democracy!" roared the senator. "The greatest gift ever handed down to mankind by Almighty God, that gives every man of us a fair and square chance at life, liberty and the pur-suit of happiness!"

He paused to take a breath and in that tiny moment of silence a new voice cut in.

"That's all right for you!" said the voice. "But what about us?"

Cut off in mid-breath, the senator's jowls remained adroop, his mouth open like a carp's. He caught his breath.

"Who said that?" he roared.

"I did," replied the voice.

"Come out here where I can see you!"

There was a rippling and a pushing in the crowd and a sudden frenzied blat of voices.

Then a woman screamed shrilly and there was a hurried mass movement to get away from the focal point of the moment.

"What's going on there?" bellowed the senator. "I said, 'who said that?'"

"I did!" snapped the voice and the next moment a big gray mule reared out of the crowd and planted its front hoofs on the speaker's platform.

**A** GURGLE died in the senator's throat. His eyes bulged out glassily.

"I've got 'em again," he muttered, passing a shaking hand before his eyes.

"No, you haven't," said the mule coldly. "And you haven't answered my question. Democracy is all right for you humans, but what about us mules? We do all the work and what do we get? Do we get a fair crack at that life, liberty and pursuit of happiness you like to talk about?"

Senator Foghorn fell backwards off the platform. The sheriff and the mayor, who had been retreating all the time the mule was speaking, scrambled hastily down and fled for their lives, abandoning their hapless political colleague. Women screamed wildly and there was a vast trampling of feet as the crowd left.

On the outskirts, Jon Egan pulled Myrtle hastily into a doorway to let the maddened throng stream fast. The girl had one palm clapped over luscious lips to keep the hysterical laughter bottled up.

"He's done it," she gurgled. "Papa's done it."

"I'm crazy," Egan whispered. "I've gone crazy and I'm seeing things."

"No, you're not, darling," Myrtle said prosaically. "I see it too, and I'm not crazy. It's poppa. He warned us and we wouldn't listen."

The mule was left alone on the deserted corner, except for the recumbent, blimp-like figure of the senator. The animal took its feet down from the platform, moved around it to look at the prone politician. As the animal's investigating nose snuffed at the senator's face, he came to life with a jerk, loosed an unsenatorial howl of terror and, rolling to his hands and knees, scuttled off like a giant crab.

The mule cocked a long ear after him and something suspiciously like laughter bubbled in its throat. Then it ambled off into the darkness and was gone.

"Come on," Jon Egan pulled Myrtle out

of the doorway. "We've got to get home and see what's happened to your father!"

"Oh, dad's all right," Myrtle assured him. "He can take care of himself."

"Maybe," Egan said grimly. "But he may have bitten off more than he can chew."

The college town was a bedlam of running, yelling people. They were turning out with shotguns, horse-pistols (no mule pistols being available) and fire-hoses.

The campus, however, was deserted and when Jon Egan and Myrtle got there, some of Egan's forebodings were suddenly made plain. The house was all but wrecked. Furniture had been knocked every which way, a lot of it was broken, a door hung askew on one hinge, the professor's laboratory was an untidy sea of broken glass and apparatus. Of the professor himself there was no sign.

"They've k-kidnaped him!" Myrtle gasped.

"What would a mule want with your father?" Egan puzzled.

The answer to that was more fantastic than anyone could have believed. A night of searching led them at last to the open countryside, where some of the remaining plantations struggled to retain the last shreds of their grandeur amongst the crowding tenant farms. And there at last, they ran the missing Professor Weedlemeyer to earth.

It had been a night of terror. A vast army of mules, according to the frantic stories, were terrorizing, pillaging, insulting the people of the town. Several had been shot at, but they apparently were invulnerable to bullets.

Jon Egan, recognizing mass hysteria clearly, thought there was probably only one mule and he had been seen simultaneously in dozens of places. As it happened he was wrong. There were two mules which, under Professor Weedlemeyer's god-like blundering, had received extra-asinine powers. And they were very busy on the old Clayburne plantation.

Egan saw them first as he and the girl pushed through the thin fringe of timber surrounding the field at the back of the house. He grabbed Myrtle and pulled her hastily back into concealment behind the moss dripping live-oaks.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Don't show yourself, just look," he breathed. And to himself he added incredulously, "if I didn't know I haven't had a drink in two days—"

Out in the field was the most fantastic, incredible, unbelievable, wild, irregular, egregious, extraordinary, strange, wonderful, remarkable, unparalleled, grotesque, bizarre, unconventional, wanton, peculiar sight they had ever seen. It was also downright queer.

**T**HERE was an old wooden ox cart in the field with high wooden wheels. Perched up in the driver's seat were two mules, reins and whip pinned clumsily in their front hoofs. And at the other end of the reins, hauling the wagon's wooden tongue, were four men, clad in nothing more than a bridle and a breech-clout apiece!

"They've reversed things!" Myrtle gasped. "The mules driving men!"

"It's democracy," Egan said, grinning a little in spite of himself. But he sobered quickly. "Look," he said pointing.

The lead man in the team was Professor Weedlemeyer.

Tarzan in a breech-clout is one thing—or Uncas. But a fat and past middle-aged professor has no dignity without his clothes. Professor Weedlemeyer was a sorry wreck of his normal rubicund self. He was gasping and disheveled with unexpected physical travail. His mouth opened for air, his eyes roamed in wild and general search for help.

"Ooh, poor papa!" Myrtle cried. "We've got to do something, Jon!"

Egan went back in the underbrush and discovered a couple of heavy tree limbs which would serve as clubs. He brought them out.

"This is probably suicide," he reflected aloud, "but we've got to make a try. When I yell—charge 'em!"

They crouched like a pair of sprinters ready for the gun and when Egan panted "Now!" they broke cover and charged.

The mules whipped long ears and eyes around to cover them. One spoke to the other.

"You take 'em, Percy. My heels are sore from kicking human rumps."

The mule with the reins tossed them to his fellow and dropped awkwardly off the wagon seat, nearly falling, but managing to regain its four feet.

Egan knew they were licked. What could even a stout club do against the lethal hoofs of a mule? And a smart mule at that who could probably outthink both of them.

But he kept charging. There was nothing

else to do except turn and run, which was undignified. Interruption came from an unexpected quarter.

The unhappy Professor Weedlemeyer straightened in his harness and with a flash of the old fire sent his voice at them.

"Jon! No! The wire—the wire!"

Befuddled, Jon slacked his racing feet to look aloft where the professor's arm pointed. The high tension wire which supplied all the town with electricity soared over this field, supported by a many-armed tower close by.

Egan didn't get it, but the word "wire" had been clear enough in the professor's shout. Obeying the impulse, he reversed his field like a running halfback and dashed for the tower.

As though sensing danger, the other mule promptly abandoned the wagon, leaped off and charged for him. The original mule bore down upon Myrtle. The girl swung her club, catching the animal on its nose.

"Ow!" yelped the mule. "I'll fix you for that, you little hinny!"

Myrtle dodged him and, gaining the shelter of the oxcart, raced around it. The men hitched to the team broke loose and scattered in every direction.

**M**EANWHILE, Jon Egan made the latticed tower a jump ahead of his pursuer and scrambled up the metal ladder like a squirrel. He continued to climb until he reached the first of the giant cross arms. There he set himself, holding on with one arm and a crooked leg, and swung his club.

A glass insulator shattered. There was a blinding blue-white flare of light accompanied by the smell of scorched insulation and metal. The wire melted, separated and the two ends fell to earth, trailing sparks and flame as they went.

"Watch those live wires!" Egan shouted.

They didn't hit anybody. But a strange thing happened just the same. The mules suddenly stopped what they were doing. Egan's mule, whose forehoofs had been planted well up on the tower ladder suddenly let himself drop back to earth as though he had lost interest in the whole thing and went to grazing.

The other mule abruptly stopped chasing Myrtle, lowered his head and also began to graze.

Egan stared down from his tower in cautious bewilderment. But Professor Weedle-

meyer waved him vigorously to earth.

"It is over, thank heavens," the savant declared shakily, wiping his forehead.

"What did it?" Egan asked. "Breaking that wire?"

"Ya. The current stopped, so it broadcasting the impulses from my house stopped. Look here."

He walked straight to one of the now docile mules. In spite of Myrtle's little shriek of fear, the professor caught the mule and brought it back. It came quietly.

"See here?" the professor revealed a thin chain around the animal's neck, high up, close to the base of the skull. A little metal capsule was held firmly against the mousy fur. "That's the impulse collector." He broke the chain and slipped the gadget into Egan's pocket. "Now we get the other and all is finished. I some clothes must get."

"Explain this donkey business!" Egan cried.

"Is simple," the professor said wearily. "I could not change the animal's brains, so I short-circuited them. I plugged in on their nervous systems with this little gadget and I broadcast the wave patterns of human brains, which I had from the house recorded. These two mules that received the impulses, like humans acted. That is all."

"I'll say they did," Egan said admiringly. "Uh, look, Professor." He cast a quick look about him. The other members of the professor's team had long since disappeared. They three were alone in the field.

"I'd advise you to ditch these capsules and from here on be just as mystified about this outbreak of mule revolution as anybody else. If you start to explain—if the town ever catches on that you had anything to do with it—they'll lynch you, do you hear?"

"Ya," the professor sighed heavily. "I hear. Und I am afraid you right got it. I say nothing, I know nothing."

"Good," Egan said firmly. "As for me—" he sighed—"what a story I miss! But nobody would believe me anyway, so what's the difference?"

"Hey," said Myrtle, "Forgot about me?"

"Who could forget you?" Egan muttered. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

The professor cleared his throat, but nobody paid him any attention. He coughed and ditto. He looked unhappy. He scratched one hairy leg with with toes of the other.

"I go some clothes get," he said. Nobody heard him, so he to get some clothes went.