

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

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VOLUME 3,
Number 5

Doorway of

It was just an ordinary revolving door in a department store—except for one thing: people went into it, but didn't come out!

by William P. McGivern

MY City Editor hung up the phone and pointed a determined finger at me.

"You're it," he said. "That's the fifteenth call I've had this morning about Barton's Department Store. It would seem something very screwy is going on over there. Check on it and let me know the minute you pick up something that we might blow up into a column. Snap into it."

"Why?" I asked.

"One excellent reason," my editor said with suspicious calm, "is that you are employed by this paper and hope to draw your check next week. Another fine reason is that there might be a story there. I know this latter reason does not appeal to your idealistic nature, but for the sake of the first—scram!"

It is my opinion that editors see too many movies and consequently get to acting like Hollywood thinks an editor ought to act. Which is a sad state of affairs for reporters.

I climbed to my feet, like the wage slave I am.

"What seems to be popping over there?" I asked, starting to leave.



Vanishing Men



The Chief of Police walked confidently through the door—and vanished!

"People," my editor said distinctly, "are disappearing over there."

"Are you kidding?" I asked suspiciously.

The slave driver shook his head. I could tell he was serious.

"That's the report. It might be just a corny gag but I've got a funny hunch it's more serious than that."

I got moving then . . .

TWENTY-TWO minutes later I walked into the office of Brixby Barton, President of the Barton Store. He was a plump, pink, harassed-looking little man with a nervous blink to his eyes. Surrounding him were a half-dozen assorted public-relations men, department heads, complaint managers, etc. Everybody looked plenty serious.

"It's the press, gentlemen," I announced. "Ready to listen, look and tell all."

Barton flushed a deeper shade of pink and tried to smile.

"Now Lansing," he said weakly, "we don't want any wild stories to get started. If you'll just be patient we'll try and give you the facts in the case. Above all we mustn't have any undesirable publicity. Is that perfectly clear?"

I began to feel my story pulse accelerating.

"I won't bother you gentlemen," I smiled, as I backed toward the door. "I'll just peek around on my own and see what's up."

"No you don't," Barton cried unsteadily. He rose from his desk and hurried to my side, panting heavily. "I don't trust you," he said, with something like desperation in his voice. "You'll get your story from us and nothing more. I'm not going to let you start any riot in this city. I carry plenty of advertising with your paper and you'll print what I tell you."

I looked at Barton closely. His eyes were widened with fear and his mouth was twitching uncontrollably.

"You're in a jam," I stated. "Something is decidedly screwy around here and I'll get the story if I have to dynamite this building. If you want to play ball, I'm willing. Give me the straight dope about what's eating you and everybody else in the store and I'll treat you as gently as I can. If you'd rather play the role of Tough Executive, okay. You'll still read the story in tomorrow morning's *News*."

Barton took a deep breath.

"You're quite mistaken," he said with an effort, "if you imagine that something—out of place is going on in my store."

"What about the people disappearing?" I snapped. "Would you call that out of place?"

Barton clapped a hand over his mouth and peered fearfully about the office.

"When did you find out?" he hissed to me.

"Come on," I said irritably, "let's dispense with the question bee. I know, that's enough, isn't it? Do you start cooperating now, or do I get this story in my own prying, snoopy, annoying fashion?"

Barton mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief and turned despairing eyes to the stooges grouped around his desk.

"I—I'll go with Mr. Lansing and show—tell him the story," he said nervously. "We must cooperate with the press, of course. D—don't give out any information on the phone while I'm away, to anyone." He turned then and opened the door. "After you, Mr. Lansing," he said tonelessly.

HE followed me out of the office and led me to the elevators. On the

way down he asked me a funny question.

"Lansing," he said earnestly, "do you believe in—in ghosts or spirits?" He blurted the last two words out as if anxious to get them off his tongue because they were hot.

I looked hard at him.

"Under certain circumstances I might," I answered. "I remember one night believing firmly in the existence of three elephants that had followed me home."

He looked rather unhappy at my answer and nothing more was said until we reached the main floor and were walking toward the main revolving doors. I broke the silence.

"What's the matter with everyone?" I asked, peering about at the clerks and customers. "They all looked scared to death."

"They probably are," Barton said unhappily. He had stopped walking and I saw that we were directly in front of the main entrance to Barton's store. The four-paneled glass revolving doors were not in motion. There was something vaguely disturbing about those doors. It might be, I decided, the odd manner that the sunlight bounced through them. The refraction was at a greater angle than the eye expected and the effect was somehow created that the panels might be out of true, or a bit warped.

Through the door I could see cars whizzing by on State street and knots of pedestrians huddled about in a peculiar manner in front of the entrance to the store.

"*LOOK!*" Barton suddenly cried in my ear.

I followed his pointing finger and saw that a man was approaching the revolving doors. Barton was staring at him, as if mesmerized.

The man stepped into the door and

shoved the panel, and the door began to revolve.

I saw the man clearly as he stepped into the door. I had been sober for a week. My eyes are good. May Heaven be my judge if I am not stating things accurately.

That man vanished completely in that revolving door.

The door turned slowly and came to a stop, concrete evidence of the energy of the man's shove. But the man had completely disappeared. I could still see the cars whizzing by on State street through the glass panels of the door. The man had stepped into the revolving door from State street, but he had never entered the interior of the store. In some mysterious way he had been blotted up like a dew drop on a June day.

I turned shakily to Barton.

"D—did you see what I think I just saw?" I asked dazedly.

Barton nodded miserably.

"It's been happening all morning," he said dully. "Men, women and children have been vanishing in that revolving door since we opened the store this morning. At first we thought it was some publicity gag some magician might be working. But before we had the doors open ten minutes our complaint department was stormed by wives, fathers, mothers, all yelling their heads off because some relative or friend disappeared in the door. We've sent workmen in to inspect the floor and the mechanism of the door and they've vanished too. It's terrible, absolutely terrible."

"Did you call the police?" I asked.

"Heavens no!" Barton exclaimed. "I couldn't stand that kind of publicity. It would absolutely ruin me."

I heard a shrill wailing siren in the distance and I smiled at Barton.

"Consider yourself ruined," I said.

"The strong arm of the law will soon be rapping at your door." I shuddered as I said that last word.

INSTINCTIVELY I glanced toward the revolving door.

"Let's find another exit," I said, "and meet the law when it arrives."

Barton nodded wordlessly and motioned me to follow him. As I turned I noticed a high-domed salesman standing before a ribbon counter which was almost directly in front of the revolving doors. He wore dark, drab clothing and perched on his bony nose were huge horn-rimmed glasses. Why I noticed him I couldn't say. Maybe it was because he was wearing a satisfied smile on his face. The only smile I had seen in the entire store that morning. Naturally it would stand out.

I hurried after Barton. He left the store by a side exit and by the time we walked around to the main entrance on State street, three black police cars were pulling to the curb. I almost swallowed my cud when I saw the Commissioner himself climb out of the first car and stride toward the revolving door.

"Hold it, Commish," I yelled. "Don't go in there."

"Why not?" he bellowed back at me.

I caught up with him and grabbed his arm.

"Funny business is going on inside," I said.

"That's why I'm here," the Commissioner snapped, "we've received about two hundred calls so far from hysterical wives and mothers and fathers. All with the same story. A loved one has disappeared without a trace in the Barton store. What do you know about things here, Lansing?"

"I don't," I said, "except that this revolving door here is a very peculiar piece of business. People go in one side of it, but don't come out the other."

"You—"

"I have not been drinking," I said, beating him to it, "but unless some one explains this thing to me in words of one syllable, every night will be New Year's eve with me from this date onward."

The Commissioner gave me a look of intense disgust.

"I might have known it would be some crackpot crank nonsense," he fumed.

"This deal," I said with great distinctness, "is no nonsense."

"Nonsense," bellowed the Commissioner. "I'll bet you a new hat I'll walk through that door as I've done a dozen times before."

"Don't do it," I pleaded. "You don't know what you're up against."

Without deigning to answer me, he wheeled and strode toward the door. His stout, bluecoated figure was visible for an instant as he shoved the panel, then he was gone. The doors revolved idly, but the Commissioner had disappeared, vanished like a puff of smoke in a breeze.

AN angry, unbelieving exclamation rose from the officers and policemen who had arrived with the commissioner. A few surged forward but I got in front of them and did my best to herd them off.

"Take my word for it," I said desperately to a sergeant, "you can't lick that door. Nobody's returned from it yet and nobody's gotten through yet. Be smart and throw a rope around this section. It's the only thing you can do."

The sergeant hesitated for an instant, then he barked the necessary orders. In a few minutes a rope cordon had been formed, completely blocking off the main entrance of the Barton store.

"This is a terrible thing to happen,"

Barton wailed, "especially on the first day of my big sale."

"Isn't it though?" I murmured.

I hurried back into the store and made my way to the main entrance again. This was where the nub of the mystery was located, I was sure. The doors continued to disturb me. Something was wrong with the light that streamed through them.

I saw the smiling salesman again, too. He was standing in front of his counter, which, it seemed, was doing little business, and gazing at the revolving doors. His smile was more than satisfied. It was fond and proud and paternal all at once. He even shook his head, as if he were admiring something rare and precious, which ordinary mortals could not perceive.

I shook my head and forgot him. I had enough to do to get some sort of a story out of this mess without wasting my time worrying about peculiar salesmen with idiotic smiles adorning their pans.

My eyes flicked about the floor, from counter to counter and noticed the universal worry and fear that was stamped on the faces of the clerks. Fear can grip a crowd and spread from person to person faster than any other emotion. While I was thinking this, a peculiar thought occurred to me. There was funny pattern to this whole thing but I couldn't make any sense out of it. The cogs didn't mesh together. I always ask myself questions; and my eyes were just swinging past the smiling, professor-like salesman when I asked myself the question, "Why?"

Why indeed?

I sauntered across the aisle until I stood beside him. He was certainly harmless enough looking, with thin, stooped shoulders and spindly arms. My little question was still bothering me though.

"Why so happy?" I asked him abruptly.

My voice startled him. He turned suddenly, looking pathetic now instead of happy.

"I—I'm sorry, officer," he stuttered breathlessly, "I—I shouldn't be day dreaming like that, but I just couldn't help it. I—I'm kinda excited."

"Why?" I asked coldly. All I needed was a whip to play Simon Legree. But as long as he thought I was an officer I decided to take advantage of it.

"Oh," he said vaguely, "just because."

"What do you think of the way things have been going around here this morning?" I asked him. I had already given him up as a dead duck.

His eyes brightened.

"Fine," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," he said happily, "with the main exit closed there's no traffic past my counter. I'm not so busy now. I can take things easy like all the other fellows do." His enormous eyes burned brightly into mine. "It isn't fair for one fellow to be stuck always in the busiest spots with never a chance to take a slow breath. That's why I changed it."

"You changed it?" I asked cautiously.

HE looked down miserably at his shoes.

"I might as well confess," he said unhappily. "I was going to hold out longer than this but I might as well give myself up now as later."

"Give yourself up?" I asked. "What for?"

"I'm responsible," he said earnestly, "for the confusion and mystery surrounding the revolving door at this exit. I didn't hurt anyone, but that

does not mitigate or extenuate my guilt. You may take me into custody."

This is typical Lansing luck. Four million people in Chicago, but I have to pick a crackpot to get suspicious of.

"Forget it, kid," I said. "The excitement's got you down."

"Please, officer," he said, "you've got to believe me. You've simply got to."

I started to turn away but something stopped me. I guess it was the sincerity in the kid's voice.

"Spill," I said, "but make it good. And just to keep the record straight I'm no copper."

"In the first place," the kid said eagerly, "that revolving door really isn't a door at all."

"Oh, oh," I said, backing away, "school's over. Pick up your marbles and go home."

He only smiled.

"It's not a door but a geometrical figure which physicists call a tesseract. A tesseract," he added, "is the visual concept of what we call the fourth dimension."*

"Lovely," I said, "but where does that bring us?"

"That revolving door," he confided in a whisper, "is really a time machine. The principle is my own idea. A tesseract shows us the fourth dimension which is actually time itself. By constructing a tesseract which will turn as this one does, it is possible to bend

* A tesseract is constructed by assuming a point (on paper for a visual concept if you wish) and moving it a short distance so as to form a line. Then the whole line is moved in a plane at right angles to form a square. The square surface thus achieved (which is where you'll have to leave your paper) is in turn moved at right angles through the third dimension. Now, theoretically, the next movement of your resulting figure, which is a cube, is at right angles to all lines of the cube (the fourth dimension) so as to form the figure in question, a tesseract. This figure, purely imaginary, is used to demonstrate that unknown place called the "fourth dimension."—Ed.

the dimensions and time so that a passage may be effected from the third dimension into time. Do you understand?"

I didn't. I didn't have the foggiest notion of what the kid was driving at. So does this sound too silly?—I believed he was handing me the straight dope.

"You did all this," I asked uneasily, "to keep the main flow of traffic away from your counter?"

"Well, why else?" he asked surprised. His burning eyes peered into mine intently. "You don't know what it means to have the time to think and ponder."

I felt very old and helpless. I wanted a drink too.

"Look, Voltaire," I said, "supposing, just supposing everything you say is true. Where are the people who went in that door?"

"They're *there*," he answered readily.

"They're—*where*?" I asked.

"In the door."

"Oh," I said, and studied the floor. Things were getting a bit too deep for me. I wished heartily that I had kept my mouth shut.

"You see," the horn-rimmed wonder said, "those people are in the fourth dimension. Every one of them is instantaneously repeating the action of stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, etc. No time passes because they are returned through the fourth dimension to the exact second in time when they stepped to the door in the first place."

"Like chain smoking," I muttered for no reason in the world.

"When they step out of the revolving door," he continued avidly, "they will be under the impression that they merely stepped through the door. Not

one of them will realize that anything unusual has happened to him."

IT was just about this time that Barton pulled up beside us, wringing his hands unhappily.

"It's terrible, absolute—"

"Forget it," I said. "Your worries are over. Almost anyway."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply.

I pointed to Hornrims.

"This young man can extricate you from the nasty situation in which you find yourself."

"Oh, thank the Good Lord," Barton breathed fervently.

"I don't see why I should," Hornrims said sulkily.

"What?" Barton demanded hysterically.

Hornrims studied his nails with magnificent nonchalance.

"It will create a great deal of inconvenience for me," he said casually. "All sorts of traffic rushing by again." Hornrims shook his head unenthusiastically. "Not much point to it, really."

Brixby Barton had not attained his present position without the aid of sharp, shrewd bargaining. My respect for the man went up a notch as he tugged thoughtfully at his lower lip.

"Tell you what," he said reluctantly, "since there will be all this business and traffic back when you open the main entrance, I'll do the handsome

thing for you." Mr. Barton beamed broadly, the picture of a man distributing largesse to faithful retainers. "I'll put you on a commission basis so you can take advantage of it."

Hornrims grabbed Mr. Barton's hand and pumped it enthusiastically. He streaked away then and came back in seconds with a ladder under his arms. Like a human squirrel he went up over the rungs and climbed off on top of the revolving doors. I don't know what he did to them, but then I haven't the foggiest idea of what he did to them in the first place. I only know what happened after he got through putting.

Human beings of every sort and description came pouring through the door, looking like the human version of the exodus from Noah's ark.

Last to emerge was the stout, over-coated figure of the Commissioner. His face was wreathed in a broad, happy smile.

"You can just buy me a hat," he said triumphantly. "I told you I'd walk right through and that's just what I did. I wasn't delayed a second."

"I'll buy the hat," I said, "but doesn't it occur to you that I made pretty good time to get inside the store before you did? You left me standing on the sidewalk y'know?"

The expression on the Commissioner's face was some compensation for the five bucks I spent on his new hat a week later.