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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

CHESTER S. GEIER is back again this issue with another "Geier" type of story. It is called, "Happiness Is Nowhere." To say that it is a "different" type of story is unnecessary since Chet has become known for his unusual themes. In this novelette he tells about a strange world in a strange time, into which a man with problems of his own in this world is thrown. He meets a girl in this strange world who tries to show this man a simple road to happiness. But as in our own world, happiness is not always easy to find. Still, there is always a way . . .



There was a whining roar of sound in his ears as the world suddenly went crazy around him

Happiness is Nowhere

by Chester S. Geier

The world he knew was bitter and filled with unhappiness. But in Jorelle he found peace and serenity and a girl called Lethra . . .

HE KNEW he couldn't keep driving much longer the way he felt. The old fever had really got him this time. His body flamed with it, his head was a balloon buffeted by a storm of pain, the road was a great gray worm that writhed and twisted before his eyes.

But Ross Downing set his lips stubbornly



and gripped the steering wheel of his maroon roadster tighter in his sweating palms. He had to make it. He had to reach the city. "I've got to tell them," he thought. "I've got to tell them I didn't pull that robbery."

A buzzing sound filled his ears. The night kept getting in his eyes. The advanced stage, Downing realized bitterly. The dangerous stage. The stage where he ought to take a dose of that miracle drug whose name he could never remember it was so long, and rest, hope this time wouldn't be the last. But he had forgotten the box of white pills in his haste. And there was no time to rest. He had to reach the city. He had to tell them. . . .

The roadster lurched and swayed down a road that dipped and curled like a road in a nightmare. Which wasn't far from the truth, for Downing's dimming perceptions warned him that the dividing line between reality and delirium was wearing very thin.

The old fever again. A deadly souvenir of his days as a soldier in the South Pacific. Downing tried to remember the name of it, and failed. He decided it didn't matter. The doctors he'd consulted had a name for it—a fancy Latin name—but that was all. The fever was one of those rare tropical things new in medical experience. The doctors knew that one of the miracle drugs for which they had another fancy name would temporarily knock the fever for a loop, but that was as far as they'd got.

So Downing had it again. The old fever had got back to its feet, and there was no gong to signal the end of each round. He's down! He's up! Over and over, on and on like that.

It was during one of his recurring attacks that Downing took a brief vacation from the business which he owned in partnership with Harris Og-

den. The rest had done him good, and Downing had felt a gradual return to some semblance of his normal self. Then he'd learned from a week-old newspaper that he was being sought for questioning in a robbery which had taken place at the firm.

Ogden had been cautious in his statement to the reporters, but even so the finger of suspicion pointed rigidly at Downing. The combination to the safe had recently been changed, and the new one was known only to Downing and Ogden. And Downing's vacation, coinciding with the robbery, made it seem as though he had opened the safe and skipped with its contents. Nor had Downing helped matters by the abrupt way in which he had left. In the throes of a latest attack of fever, he had given no thought to details. Just a brief telephone call to Grace, a terse note to Ogden, and Downing had gone without telling either where he intended to stay.

DOWNING hoped fervently that his tardiness in learning of the robbery had not done him irreparable harm in the eyes of Grace and Ogden. He didn't care what other people thought. But Grace Winters was the girl he hoped to marry, and Harris Ogden was his best friend. What *they* thought mattered a lot.

Downing felt confident that he could establish his innocence readily enough. He had written the new combination to the safe on a slip of paper. This had obviously become dislodged from the pocket where he had placed it the day the fever struck him. He hadn't noticed it. He'd been down again. But thinking back, Downing did recall seeing Fred Radek, one of the clerks, pick something from the floor when the latter had left his office after delivering a sheaf of reports.

The object Radek had picked from

the floor could likely have been the slip of paper bearing the new combination to the safe. In any event, Downing's return would lift suspicion from himself and focus it on those of the office staff who could have been in a position to find the slip of paper and use the information it contained. Just a little careful undercover investigation by the police—and somewhere along the line they would be sure to find someone who had been acting a bit too strangely, spending a bit too much.

It was this hope that kept Downing in motion against the dragging weight of his illness. He was innocent and he had to prove it. Every second that passed damned him further in the estimation of Grace and Ogden.

The roadster roared on through the night, its headlights plowing the darkness. Once a milepost flashed by, and Downing caught a glimpse of the figures. Just ten miles more and he'd be in the city. He knotted his jaw, grimly determined to last that long.

The image of the milepost was still in Downing's eyes when suddenly there swept over him a strange giddy feeling which he had never before experienced in connection with his attacks of fever. It was as though he were falling, falling endlessly. And then his body was subjected to a painful twisting and wrenching as though he were being twisted inside out. The next thing Downing knew it was daylight.

Daylight!

Shock brought his foot tromping down on the brakes of the roadster, bringing it to an abrupt stop. He stared about him incredulously. A great wave of cold dismay swept over him. During the interval while that strange sensation had wracked him, night had somehow changed into day!

Then Downing saw that this had not been the only transition. The world

as he knew it had changed, too. For the sky was a vivid emerald green, and the sun that shone in it at zenith was a huge red-gold orb. This was no sun, this was no sky of Earth!

DOWNING sucked in a great shuddering breath, becoming aware as he did so of a host of rich tangy odors strange to him. What had happened? *What had happened?* The question thundered in his mind.

Darting bewildered glances about him, Downing saw that the roadster rested upon what seemed to be a broad highway. But it was not the familiar gray of concrete. Instead, it was a clear, glassy white. He probed his startled mind, but he could not remember having seen this sort of pavement before.

On either side of the highway was a smooth, grass-like expanse of olive-green that rolled gently away and away toward a range of low hills on the horizon. Spaced about with a curious suggestion of symmetry were strange trees with green boles and foliage of a brilliant yellow. Downing found the bizarre landscape almost park-like in appearance, and there were indications that it was carefully kept. And then he abruptly lost interest in his immediate surroundings as his eyes chanced upon a tiny white angularity almost lost in vegetation far down the highway. A house! It had to be. Downing prayed that it wasn't anything else. A house would mean people, and people would mean answers and guidance.

Downing jerked the roadster into motion. The mental shock brought on by the weird transformation had not done his fever any good. For now as the temporary stimulation wore off, an abrupt dizziness swept over him and a veil of corruscating darkness dropped before his eyes. The roadster lurched,

almost ran off the highway. Downing shook his head sharply, fought for the control which was fast slipping from him.

The buzzing was back in his ears, only louder now. The voices of delirium called in a swelling chorus. The dark veil dropped before his eyes again, and this time it was more difficult to tear it away. Consciousness was a candleflame flickering in a constantly rising wind.

Downing saw the white object more clearly now, but it was as something glimpsed through a storm. It was a house sure enough, a strange angular white house.

The storm that was his fever raged more fiercely. The candleflame flickered—flickered. Pure instinctive reaction brought Downing's foot down on the brake pedal as the roadster ran off the highway. A last flicker—and the voices of delirium rose suddenly in welcome.

DARKNESS, light, sound—jumbled together in an insane pattern of flashes and tones. Sweet, slow music. An abrupt clap of deafening thunder. Grace, in a vivid yellow dress that somehow hurt his eyes, smiling at him with her soft red mouth, her snub nose wrinkled in the old, familiar way. Then—an apparition with olive-green hair streaming out in a lashing gale and two red-gold orbs for eyes that ran at him with clawed hands screaming, "Thief! Thief!" And then he lay naked in the middle of a milky-white desert while a green sun beat down at him in wave after searing wave of heat. He was parched. His tongue was a woolly thing that swelled in his throat—larger, larger, became a huge melon that finally burst with a furious tinkling of crystalline bells. And then he was floating up, up, higher, ever higher, weightlessly,

up, ever up, into a great soft darkness that folded gently around him, cuddled him warmly. "Sleep, baby, sleep. Close your bright blue eyes. . . ." A crash of cymbals, a roll of drums, and it began all over again. Over and over again. Years and years of it, and then merciful darkness, nothingness, utter and complete.

Light filtered through the darkness, grew, became a flood held in check by the gates of his eyelids. He lay very still, aware of his growing consciousness, searching among the ashes of delirium for fragments of reality. Recollection gradually came to him. The roadster. The strange world of the emerald-green sky and the red-gold sun. Impossible, he decided. Just fragments of his fevered dreams.

Something warm and soft and gentle touched his forehead. The contact startled him. His eyes jerked open. The breath became a log-jam in his throat.

Downing found himself staring at a girl of exotic, fawn-like loveliness. Her hand had recoiled from his forehead the moment his eyes opened, and now she gazed back at him in tense comprehension of his scrutiny. She did not seem alarmed. It was more as though she had abruptly been confronted with a new situation and did not quite know how to adjust to it.

The silence between them thickened. Downing sensed that his was the next move, his the cue which would create a new state of relations. But for the moment the unearthly beauty-of the girl who faced him held him fascinated.

Her unusual eyes were the first things he had noticed. They were tawny, flecked with gold, slightly tilted at their outer corners, and fringed heavily with dark lashes. Her skin was like rich cream with a faint golden tint. Against it her long hair glowed with the

deep, dark red of mahogany. She was dressed in a tight-fitting sleeveless silver jacket. A short skirt of some silken blue material fell in graceful folds midway to her shapely knees.

The girl had been bending over him. Now she straightened slowly, a flush covering her cheeks.

DOWNING awoke suddenly to the realization that he was staring rudely. He felt instantly contrite. He smiled what he hoped was a smile of apology. "Hello," he said.

The girl's dark brows drew together in a dainty frown. "*Hal-loo?*" she echoed questioningly. She shook her head, her long tresses glinting with the movement. "*Nai shannaer atti.*" Her voice was soft, curiously lilting.

"Don't get me, eh?" Downing decided. "Far as that goes, what you said is Greek to me, too." He translated with a smile and a shake of his head.

The girl studied him a moment with a child-like solemnity. Then she smiled in response, shrugged her slender shoulders. "*Naia shannaern ella voss.*"

"That goes for me, too," Downing chuckled. He sobered abruptly as the knowledge struck him that he had somehow been acting out of character. For a moment the reason puzzled him. Then the answer flashed through him. He felt—*good!* He was weak, true enough, but he felt better than he'd had in years. The fever seemed to have left him entirely.

With that came awareness of something else. He was hungry—reavenously hungry, in fact.

Downing pointed at his mouth, then rubbed his stomach. He screwed up his face as though in pain. The girl understood, for she smiled in quick sympathy and hurried from the room.

Downing seized the opportunity to examine his surroundings. He saw that

he was in a large, pleasant room, furnished with a kind of simple elegance. Drapes of a deep rose color covered one wall in which obviously was located a window, since a bar of sunlight slanted down through an opening in the material. A large chest of some lustrous dark wood stood against another wall, and beside it was a full-length mirror set in a metal frame. There was a curtained doorway beyond which Downing decided lay a bath or something of the sort. In the middle of the room stood a chair and table of strange design. The bed in which Downing lay was low and box-like, but fully as soft and comfortable as any bed he had ever known.

Downing came to the conclusion that it was a nice room. There were no frills about it, yet the obvious luxury of its simple furnishings gave it a certain charm.

Downing stretched, revelling in his sensations of well-being. He'd had the fever so long, he'd forgotten what it was like to feel really well. Must be something about the climate, he decided.

ABRUPTLY he sobered. The climate of—where? Where was he? What had happened to him? Stark memory came of the falling experience, the sudden twisting and wrenching—and then, the bizarre world of the green sky and the red-gold sun. Obviously, he was still there, to judge from the strangeness of the room in which he lay and the exotic beauty of the girl whom he had seen upon awakening. As to how he had reached the room at all, Downing decided that the occupants of the house he had glimpsed before losing consciousness in the roadster had found him and carried him there.

Anxiety kindled within Downing as he wondered if it would be possible to

return to Earth. He couldn't stay here—wherever "here" was. Everything he knew or loved was back in the world from which he had come. He thought with sudden poignancy of Ogden, chubby and gay, the best friend he'd ever had. And he thought of Grace, with her snub nose and her laughing blue eyes, her gleaming brown hair falling in soft curls about her shoulders. Grace—the girl he was to marry.

Downing resisted the sudden temptation to throw aside his covers, return to his roadster, and drive, drive, until somehow the familiar sights of Earth were once more about him. Ogden and Grace must not be allowed to go on thinking that he was a thief—hiding with his loot. He had to prove to them that he was innocent.

Apprehension chilled Downing like an icy wind. He had to return. He had to. But—but what if there was no return?

Light footfalls heralded the reappearance of the exotic other-world girl. She bore a tray which she set down on the bed beside Downing. On the tray were a bowl of gruel or soup, a goblet containing a thick, yellow-tinted liquid which might have been milk, and a large platter of bright strange fruit.

Downing did not need the girl's gestured invitation to spur him on. He fell to hungrily. The food was delicious, though as strange to his taste as was everything else to his other senses.

The girl went to the windows and pulled aside the drapes. Sunlight poured into the room in a rich rosy flood. That done, the girl became busily occupied with the room, arranging the furniture with minute care and dabbing at their gleaming surfaces with a wadded cloth which she had brought with her. From time to time, she glanced curiously at Downing as if to note his progress on the food.

Finally Downing was finished. He leaned back upon the bed with a sigh of contentment. The girl came forward to take the tray and dishes.

"*Dreanna?*" she queried in her soft voice.

"If you mean was it good, it certainly was," Downing said. "And, say, there are a few things I'd like to know." He pointed at himself. "Ross," he said. "Ross Downing." He pointed at the girl and looked a question.

Her smile had a trace of shyness. "Lethra," she responded.

Downing pointed next to the window, beyond which showed a patch of emerald-green sky and an expanse of rolling olive-green fields. He looked another question.

"Valledon," the girl said.

WHAT Downing had wanted was the name of the world which he had so inexplicably entered. He wondered if the name the girl had given him was merely the name of the nation or continent wherein the house was located. He decided to make sure.

Downing pointed to the window again, but this time he waved an arm in an all-inclusive gesture. The girl gave a smile and nod of sudden comprehension. "Jorelle," she said.

Jorelle, then, must be the name of this other-place, Downing thought. But—where was Jorelle?

Downing ceased further speculation on the subject as a tall elderly man strode quietly into the room. He glanced with friendly interest at Downing, then looked inquiringly at the girl. She spoke rapidly in her soft, lilting voice. Her explanation was charmingly animated. Watching her, Downing heard his name mentioned. Then the girl pointed to the elderly man. "Churran," she told Downing.

Downing grinned and held out his

hand. "Pleased to meet you," he said.

Churran made a stately bow. Then, noticing Downing's extended hand, he looked puzzled. Obviously, Downing decided, the shaking of hands was a gesture unknown in Jorelle. He dropped his hand quickly and sought to make up for his mistake by replying with a bow of his own. Performed as it was in a reclining position, the effect must have been comic, for Churran smiled while Lethra's soft laughter chimed merrily.

Churran was clearly Lethra's father, for there was a strong physical resemblance between the two. Like the girl, he wore a sleeveless silver jacket, but with long, loose trousers bound in at the ankles. He was smooth-shaven, his grizzled gray locks held back from temples and forehead by a silver circlet. There was a quiet dignity about his appearance that Downing instantly liked.

Churran did not stay long—or rather Lethra did not let him stay. She bustled her father from the room, energetically straightened the bedcovers about Downing, and then, gathering up the tray from the table where she had placed it, she left.

The food had made Downing sleepy. He closed his eyes and shortly after he drifted off into slumber.

THE days that followed might have been idyllic were it not for Downing's constant gnawing desire to return to Earth and vindicate himself in the eyes of Grace and Ogden. His earlier feeling of well-being had not been illusory, since strength quickly returned to him. At last came the day when Lethra would permit him to leave the bed and don his clothes. She led him out to a garden at the rear of the house.

The garden was large and well-tended. In the center of it was a small

fountain built of some pink stone and surmounted by the metal figure of a fairy-like being holding a shell in one extended hand. Water dripped from the shell and fell into the pool below with musical splashing. Large trees with brilliant yellow foliage shaded flagstone walks dotted here and there with benches made of the same pink stone as the fountain. Birds of vivid rainbow plumage flew twittering and chirping in and out among the trees, and the smell of myriad banked flowers hung with heady fragrance on the air.

Lethra took Downing on a tour of the garden, and then, as though fearing the exercise would be too much for him, she pulled him down upon a stone bench. "*Dreanna?*" she asked.

"Swell!" Downing said. He really meant it. The riotous tropical beauty of the place was compelling for all its strangeness of color and detail. If Grace were with him, he knew he could be very happy here. But Grace was far away—very far away. In another world. Downing wondered if he would ever see her again—Grace, and Ogden, and Chicago, with all its old familiar sights.

He turned at a light touch on his arm. Lethra was gazing at him worriedly. "*Atti nai serrata?*"

Downing forced a smile and shook his head. Lethra smiled, too, but her tawny eyes were troubled.

A silence fell between them. Downing gazed at the ground, lost again in brooding. Only dimly was he conscious of the music of the fountain and the voices of the birds.

Suddenly Lethra rose, and as Downing looked up in response to the movement, she motioned to him with a graceful motion of one slender arm. Downing caught a glimpse of her lovely face before she turned to walk back toward the house. It was sad. Down-

ing rose to follow her, chiding himself for troubling the girl with his worries.

Lethra took Downing now to a small building located a short distance from the rear of the main house. It was a workshop or something of the sort. Downing saw workbenches littered with tools, various small machines, shelves and cabinets filled with a wide assortment of objects. Churran was bent over what seemed to be a metal-working device, shaping a spinning silver ovoid with a cutting tool. He looked up from his work at the entrance of Downing and the girl, smiled in welcome.

CHURRAN was a silversmith or an artisan of a closely allied nature. Lethra showed Downing vases, goblets, and plates, all exquisitely wrought of strange yet obviously precious metals. Creating things with his hands had always held a strong fascination for Downing. He found Churran's work intensely interesting. It was with the eagerness of a boy that he touched the machines and the tools and watched Churran make signs of explanation. The morning passed swiftly while Downing absorbed himself in the wonders of Churran's workshop. His interest seemed to please Lethra and Churran immensely.

After the noon meal, Downing returned to the workshop with Churran. At Downing's own insistence, Churran provided him with a piece of abrasive cloth, and Downing set to work, polishing the first of a set of goblets which Churran was engaged in turning out.

Evening came. Further work for the day was halted. Downing's arms ached, and the heaviness of his head warned him that he wasn't as well as he'd thought. His activity, light as it had been, had made itself only too strongly felt. He decided to postpone his plans

for leaving Jorelle until he was absolutely certain of his recovery.

As he sat in the garden with Lethra and Churran, Downing remembered his roadster. Concern for the safety of the car struck him abruptly. He questioned his hosts about it as best he could through the medium of signs.

Churran assured Downing that the roadster was intact. Downing's interest in the car seemed to sadden Churran and Lethra. They gazed at each other with a kind of quiet despair.

The days passed quickly for Downing. He spent the greater part of each in Churran's workshop, laboring industriously over such minor tasks as he could perform. He was learning rapidly to use the various tools and machines, and his increasing skill seemed a constant delight to Churran. He was learning the language of Jorelle, too, for Lethra and Churran seized every opportunity to explain the meaning of words to him. His vocabulary was soon large enough to encompass simple conversations.

"You are not of Jorelle," Churran told Downing one evening as they sat in the garden. "Is it true, then, that you have come from some other world?"

DOWNING nodded slowly. "From a world called Earth. But where it is now, and how I arrived here, are things unknown to me." Downing explained about his attack of fever and how, while driving the roadster, he had suddenly found himself in Jorelle.

"But is not your strange machine a vehicle for traveling between worlds?" Lethra asked in surprise. "Such Churran and I have thought it to be."

"Why, no," Downing responded. "It is merely a device for traveling on the surface of a world." He gazed at Lethra narrowly. "What do you know of traveling between worlds?"

"It is said our people once possessed this ability," Lethra replied. "Legends tell that we originally came from a world called Trantor. We of Jorelle are—how shall I say it?—travelers who go to live in another place."

"Colonists," Downing supplied.

"A strange word," Lethra said. "Anyway, not many of us came to live here on Jorelle. Before the machines that traveled between worlds could bring more, there was what legends call a war. Because of this, the machines no longer came to Jorelle."

"War!" Churran said abruptly. "It is an evil word. We do not speak it here, except in connection with the legends."

"But is there no war on Jorelle?" Downing asked.

"No," Churran said. "Why should there be? There are too few of us here on Jorelle for war. We are happy. Our system of service keeps our few wants amply supplied."

"Service?" Downing echoed. "Is that your term for government?"

Churran smiled. "And what is government?"

"Why, it is a body of selected men who make and enforce the laws by which a nation is ruled."

"We have no government on Jorelle," Churran said with a shake of his graying locks. "And no laws save those of service, which are the basic laws of survival among civilized men. Stated simply, to obtain your bread, you must be of service to the man who makes the bread."

"Is this literal?" Downing wanted to know. "I mean, do you deal directly with the butcher, the baker, and the weaver, exchanging your products for theirs?"

"No. Everyone deals through a service distribution center. My product, once it reaches the service distribution

center, becomes the property of others, just as the products of others become my property. But everything is apportioned off according to the needs of the individual. No one product is considered more important than other products. No one individual is entitled to any more than other individuals."

"Is it not thus on your world?" Lethra asked Downing.

HE LOOKED away. "No. . . . The people of my world work for a medium of exchange which we call money. With money they buy the things they need. Some make more money than others, and are able to buy not only more things but better things. And some do not make enough money, and never have all the things they need."

"Madness!" Churran growled. "Sheer madness. How can all be happy in a world like that?"

"Very few are happy," Downing admitted with a sigh.

"And yet you wish to return there," Lethra said.

Downing shrugged. "It is where I belong. Everything I know or love is there."

A silence fell over Lethra and Churran. It was now too dark for Downing to see their faces, but he sensed, from the special quality of their silence, that his words had saddened them as they always did. He knew they wanted very much for him to stay, and in other circumstances he would have been only too glad to do so. Jorelle was a beautiful world, a place where a man could be happy and at peace. And both Lethra and Churran were two of the finest people he had ever known. He could easily grow to love them—especially Lethra, who would make the prettiest, sweetest wife a man could ever hope to have. But, Downing reminded him-

self, he already had these things in Grace and Ogden. And more, they were his kind of people. They were of the world which he knew and belonged to.

Churran's voice came suddenly into the darkness. "I have been thinking about how it could have happened that you entered Jorelle. I have read the old books—the books written by the men who built the machines that once traveled between the worlds—and I think I know. The old books tell of worlds existing side by side—yet the one completely unknown to the other. It is possible that such is the relationship between your world and Jorelle. Per- at one certain point the barrier between Earth and Jorelle was very thin. You happened to reach this point in your vehicle while ill with what you call fever. You entered Jorelle—not because of the thinness of the barrier at that point, but because of your state of mind brought on by the fever. The old books hint that there are strange powers slumbering within our minds. Who knows but that your fever awakened one of them, giving you the ability to enter coexistent worlds where the barriers between them happened to be very thin?"

"It is an interesting subject," Downing said. His voice quickened with eagerness. "But . . . but do you think it is possible for me to get back to Earth?"

"Perhaps," Churran responded slowly. "You are not native to Jorelle. Thus it should be easier for you to enter your world than it was to leave it."

It was a slim hope, but Downing clung to it. He decided to put Churran's theory to a test. He was now completely well. The roadster was waiting on a stretch of lawn beside the house where he had brought it some weeks before. Everything was in readiness.

IN THE morning Downing began his preparations for leaving. He had been wearing a set of garments belonging to Churran. Now he donned his own which, due to Lethra's painstaking care, were in excellent condition. He gave the roadster a final check-over, and then he was ready.

Lethra and Churran stood by to see him off. Lethra's tawny eyes swam in tears which she was futilely trying to hold back, and sadness deepened the lines of Churran's face.

Downing touched Lethra's cheek. "Smile, little Lethra. Memory of you with tears in your eyes would not be a happy one. And the only memories I want to take with me are happy ones."

With a superbly gallant effort, Lethra smiled—but two large tears rolled sparkling down her cheeks.

"That's right," Downing said. "That's the way I'll remember you. Farewell, Lethra."

"Farewell," she said softly. "Farewell, Ross."

Downing gripped Churran's arm. Then he turned, quickly, slid in under the wheel of the roadster, and roared off. Downing sped down the road in the direction from which he had approached Churran's house when first finding himself in Jorelle. Occasionally he slowed to glance back toward the house and note its diminishing size. Finally it was just a white angularity almost lost in vegetation far down the road. Downing tensed. *Now*, he thought. *Now!*

His senses flaring alertly, Downing cruised the roadster along the road. But the twisting and wrenching sensation did not come, though he went past the spot where he judged he had earlier entered Jorelle. Was return to Earth impossible after all? he wondered with dismay. Then an idea struck him.

Churran had said the translation from Earth to Jorelle involved the mind. Thus, perhaps, merely touching the critical juncture between the two worlds was not enough. Perhaps the mind had again to be brought into play.

But how? Downing thought despairingly. How could he know how his mind had acted during fever? Abruptly Downing remembered Churran's statement that it should be easier to gain access to Earth than it had been to leave it. Maybe will-power, the sheer desire to get back to Earth, would be enough to get him over the borderline.

Downing spun the roadster about and once more cruised down the road. This time, however, he reiterated over and over in his mind the overpowering wish to get back mingled with the insistent, confident assertion that he *would* get back.

AND it worked! A sudden giddiness seized him, as though he were falling, falling endlessly and to nowhere. Then—the familiar twisting and wrenching sensation. When it had gone, Downing found himself on a road which was the well-remembered gray of concrete. The sky overhead was blue, and the landscape was the old untidy one of weeds and fences and advertisements.

Downing's elation was cut short as the realization struck into him that it was cold. Cold? He frowned in bewilderment. It had been late spring when he had last seen Earth, and he had been in Jorelle a little less than two months. It should now be summer, and warm, yet—yet somehow it was cold.

Downing glanced at the sky again. Now he saw that evening was approaching. He estimated that he would reach the city shortly before dark. He hunched over the steering wheel of the

roadster, and his foot pressed the accelerator down, down.

A gas station appeared up the road. Downing had earlier noted that his supply of gas was getting low. Now he decided to refill while he had the opportunity. He slowed the roadster, turned it into the driveway of the gas station.

Downing fidgeted impatiently while the tank was being filled. After what seemed years, the station attendant approached the window for his change.

Downing thrust a bill at the man and was shifting the roadster into gear when suddenly the station attendant spoke.

"Say, mister, if I were you I'd do something about those license plates."

"What's wrong with them?" Downing demanded.

"They're two years out of date," the station attendant said. "You're going to get pinched if a cop catches you."

"Two years out of date!" Downing gasped. "But—but that's impossible!"

"It's possible, all right. Take a look at them yourself." The station attendant peered searchingly at Downing. "Say, where you been to lost track of time like that?"

"Vacation," Downing muttered. "A long vacation." He shrugged aside the proffered handful of change and completed his act of putting the roadster into motion. His thoughts whirled chaotically. Two years! *Two years!* Incredibly, two years had passed during his sojourn in Jorelle of a little less than two months!

Miles swept by under the spinning wheels of the roadster while Downing mulled the chilling knowledge over in his mind, warming it for assimilation, for dazed acceptance as fact. Time-rate, he thought abruptly. The time-rate of Jorelle was not the same as that of Earth. One month on Jorelle

was almost equivalent to one year on Earth.

DOWNING was appalled. How could he ever hope now to convince Grace and Ogden of his innocence? The passing of two years must have hardened their belief in his guilt beyond all hope of cracking.

Downing thought despairingly of turning the roadster around and going back to Jorelle. Then he remembered that return was possible only through a special mental condition brought on by fever—and he was perfectly well.

He sought desperately for some course of action. With Grace and Ogden against him, there was no one to whom he could turn for help. And what money he had wouldn't last very long. The thought of starting anew, almost penniless and under an assumed identity, was humiliating.

Abruptly the thought came to Downing that during the past two years the real thief might have been found. Forlorn as the possibility seemed, Downing decided to act on it. He pressed down on the accelerator with renewed determination.

Night was falling when Downing reached the city. The coldness of which he had earlier become aware was now emphasized by a light flurry of snow. A clock set over the entrance of a building he passed showed the time to be a little after five. Ogden should still be at the office, Downing thought. He'd go there first of all.

Downing pulled up in front of the familiar squat building which had once housed the firm of Ogden and Downing. The illuminated sign jutting out over the door now announced it as Harris Ogden and Co. The last trickles of a tide of homeward bound employees were flowing out into the street. Downing pulled his hat low over his eyes

and waited until all had gone. Then he pulled open the door and strode quickly into the building.

Entering the reception room, Downing saw light streaming through the partly opened door of Ogden's office. He pushed past the gate in the wooden railing and approached the door. As he did so, he became aware of voices.

"... thought I'd surprise you darling. Know what today is?"

"If you expected me to forget, you're doomed to disappointment. Our anniversary, of course."

There was a sudden silence. Downing sucked the silence into his lungs along with a deep slow breath. The first voice had been Grace's, the second Ogden's.

Straightening with a return of purpose, Downing pushed the door open, strode into the room beyond. Grace and Ogden were wrapped in a close embrace, oblivious of everything save the pressure of their lips, one on the other.

THEY parted. Ogden saw Downing first. His chubby face paled as though at sight of a ghost. Startled at his expression, Grace whirled.

"Ross!" The name burst from the two of them almost simultaneously.

Downing's smile was thin-lipped and sardonic. "Well! Nobody seems to have been doing much crying over me. The mice will play while the cat's away, eh?" He was bitterly sarcastic. He was using the wrong approach, and he knew it. He had forgotten that two months to him was two years to them. But it had hurt, entering the room and finding the girl he had been engaged to marry in the arms of his best friend.

Ogden pulled up his plump figure with indignation. "See here, Ross, if anyone's in a position to make explanations it's yourself. As for your remark about the mice and the cat, I'll have

you understand that Grace is now my wife. We've been married exactly a year today." Ogden's full lips twisted in a sneer. "What have you come back for? Were you hoping to find the safe open?"

Downing shook his head gravely. "I came back to clear myself, Harris."

"After two years? Don't be a fool. Better take my advice and go back into hiding."

"The police are still looking for you, Ross," Grace put in. "If they find you here in the city, it'll mean prison."

Downing held up a hand. "Please. You both are thoroughly convinced of my guilt, and I don't blame you. All I ask is that you listen to my explanation." Downing spoke earnestly and softly. He began with the day the fever struck him, and, dazed, losing the slip of paper bearing the new combination to the company safe. He told of having seen Fred Radek pick up something from the floor of his office. Then the vacation on which he had gone to overcome his fever. The newspaper and his trip back to the city. The weird transition to Jorelle, and finally his return, to find that two years had passed.

"A likely story," Ogden grunted. "How on earth you ever expected people as intelligent as Grace and myself to swallow such a fairy tale is beyond my understanding."

"I know just how it sounds," Downing said patiently. "Give me credit for a little intelligence myself, won't you? Do you think I'd be telling you such a story if it weren't true? I swear by everything that's honorable and decent that this actually happened." Downing threw out his hands imploringly. "Harris, think back upon our friendship. Think of the swell times we had together. Was there ever anything about my character or personality which would suggest I was capable of doing

such a rotten thing as robbing the safe?" Downing turned to the girl. "Grace, do you?"

THEY were cold and unmoved. The sneer crept back upon Ogden's face. Grace lowered her eyes and looked away.

"Look here," Downing pursued doggedly. "Harris, after the theft do you recall any of the office staff suddenly quitting, wearing new clothes, coming into money, or anything at all the least bit out of the ordinary happening?"

Ogden shrugged plump shoulders. "After two years it isn't easy to remember a good deal. But I do seem to recall Fred Radek quitting a few months after the theft. He was supposed to have left for another job, or something of the sort."

"Radek!" Downing exclaimed. "The same man who picked something from the floor of my office—something which very likely could have been the combination to the safe!"

Ogden shrugged again. "You'd have to find Radek to prove anything. And in two years he's had enough time to put a lot of distance behind himself. Anyway, I prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. This matter is finished as far as I'm concerned."

"But . . . but aren't you going to give me a chance to clear myself?" Downing asked in dismay.

"And do what amounts almost to cutting my own throat at the same time?" Ogden countered. He laughed harshly. "If I were successful in helping you, I'd have to take you back into the business as a partner. And why should I do that, when the business as it now is, is the result of my own efforts during the past two years? No—I've got all the gravy on my plate, and I intend to keep it there."

"Grace . . ." Downing turned to her

as though he were a drowning man and she a straw.

Grace refused to look at him. "Harris is now my husband," she said coldly. "His interests are my interests. I agree perfectly with what he says."

Downing was stunned. The blood roared in his ears, and the room seemed to rock crazily. He felt cold and hollow and aching.

Ogden crooked an arm to glance at his wristwatch. "Grace and I have plans for the evening. Our anniversary, you know. Take my advice, Ross, and go back to wherever you came from. The police are still looking for you, and if you persist in molesting me, I won't hesitate to turn you in." He reached suddenly into the breast pocket of his expensively tailored suit and extracted a wallet. "If you need some money, I'll be glad—" Ogden broke off abruptly and backed away. "Ross! Don't you dare touch me!"

Downing continued to glare in cold fury. "I wouldn't dirty my hands. And that goes for both of you!" He turned and stalked from the room.

BACK in his roadster, Downing drove aimlessly, no thought of a particular destination in mind. He coughed several times, unaware at first of doing so. Then, as his coughs increased, he grew alarmed. He realized he'd been driving for some time now in the bitter cold, and he had no overcoat. His throat felt raw and his nose was stuffed. He decided that his stay in Jorelle had somehow increased his receptivity to colds.

Jorelle! Downing seized at the thought eagerly. Jorelle, the world that was nowhere—the nowhere that was his last bid for happiness. He thought with sudden poignancy of Lethra and Churran. In memory he saw Lethra's strange tawny eyes and the deep red

hair that hung in glowing splendor about her shoulders. Yearning to be back in Jorelle ached abruptly within him.

"Hey, buddy, pull over to the curb!"

The rough voice shook Downing from his brooding. He turned his head to see a police car gliding alongside his roadster.

Panic swept him like an icy wind. The police!

Ogden and Grace had warned him that he was still being sought. Had they, fearing for their security, put the police on his trail?

Downing saw the results of capture with harsh clarity. He'd have no chance to prove his innocence. The passing of two years had destroyed every hope of doing so. He'd be convicted, shut up in a hard gray cell. The fever would come back. He'd have attacks of it over and over. The fever and the long years in prison would kill him slowly and inexorably.

He couldn't allow himself to be captured. He had to reach Jorelle—or die!

Downing roused into flashing activity. Jamming his foot down upon the accelerator, he turned the wheel of the roadster hard over, cut directly in front of the police car. The driver automatically braked to prevent a collision. Downing roared across the opposite traffic lane just as the lights changed. A stream of vehicles flowed into motion, blocking off the police car effectively.

DOWNING piled distance behind himself. Finally he pulled up into the dark mouth of an alley to rest and plan. His heart seemed to be beating in his throat, and there was something he had to fight for. His coughing had increased in force and frequency. Chilling spasms wracked him, followed by

intervals of clammy warmth. His fever was coming back. He sensed it with the conviction of long familiarity.

But this time he welcomed its coming. The fever was his passport to Jorelle.

Several times while Downing huddled in the car, alternately shivering and sweating, police cars prowled past his refuge. The alarm had been sent out. They were hunting for him relentlessly.

Downing waited, while his head grew heavy and aching and the fever kindled and finally flamed within him as of old. Night deepened. There was another flurry of falling snow. A thin biting wind lifted the snow and sent it whirling and twisting in white clouds along the street.

As Downing sat thinking, it suddenly occurred to him that the police might not be seeking him in connection with the theft at all. It could very likely have been his outdated license plates that had drawn their attention to him. But the damage had been done. By his very act of fleeing, he had labeled himself a suspicious character, someone to be sought and questioned. If he were taken into custody, his identity would be discovered, and his arrest for the theft would follow as a matter of course.

At last Downing decided it was safe to venture from his hiding place. Enough time had elapsed for the police to lose their first flush of enthusiasm for the chase.

Downing toiled the car from the alley, and keeping to dark, less-frequented streets, began to wend his way out of the city. The houses were beginning to thin when abruptly the wail of a police siren rose behind Downing. He twisted around in his seat, darted a glance behind him. A police car was coming after him—and fast!

Downing ground the accelerator into the floorboards. The roadster leaped ahead like a spurred horse.

Downing hunched over the wheel, fighting for clarity of vision through the fog which was beginning to veil his eyes. The wail of the siren in his rear rose in volume.

Downing jerked the roadster up one street, down another, over and over, in desperate attempts to throw the police car off his trail. Because of the fact that he took almost incredible risks in doing so, he succeeded momentarily. The wail of the siren still followed him, but the glare of pursuing headlights was gone. Downing headed for the road and open country—and Jorelle.

Downing had shaken the police car in a sparsely settled subdivision. Streets were few, and the police quickly regained his trail. Downing had made a gain in distance, but his pursuers quickly closed the gap.

It was all straight driving now. Downing had a lead, and he intended to keep it. He had the accelerator rammed down as far as it would go. He found it increasingly hard to see. A darkening mist swam before his eyes, and each attempt to remove it took more effort than the last. Every jolt and sway of the roadster brought pain that threatened to split his head. And then the road began to twist and curl like a great, gray worm.

SUDDENLY Downing became aware that the shrill voice of the siren behind him had grown louder. Was the police car gaining on him? Glancing back, he saw a single headlight bobbing in his wake, growing larger. A highway patrolman had poined the chase!

Despair clutched at Downing sickeningly. On the motorcycle the patrolman would soon catch up. If Downing
(Concluded on page 178)

HAPPINESS IS NOWHERE . . .*(Concluded from page 127)*

did not stop, shots from the patrolman's revolver would blast his tires into shreds, send the roadster hurtling to destruction.

Downing gripped the wheel with sweating hands. His heart was a trip-hammer in his chest. The motorcycle behind him was gaining—gaining. Its siren was a shriek of doom in his ears. Abruptly, almost lost in the roar of engines and the wailing of sirens, Downing heard a dull, flat report. A shot! The patrolman, certain now that Downing would not stop, had opened fire.

In a moment of lucidity, Downing glimpsed a milepost up the road. Something about it and the surrounding countryside seemed familiar to him. And then, abruptly, he had the sensation of falling, falling. There was a twisting and wrenching—and then, the night was gone, and the cold was gone, and the sky was a vivid emerald green, and the sun, still rising, was a huge red-gold orb.

Jorelle!

The knowledge rang within Downing like a carillon. He did not slacken the furious speed of the roadster. He kept right on going, straight to the angular white house almost lost in vegetation far down the road. Two figures ran out to meet him as he drew up to a stop.

"Ross! Ross!" It was Lethra, joyful and amazed. "You've come back?"

Downing touched her cheek, smiling into her tawny eyes, his fever, everything, forgotten. "I've come back, little Lehra. Back to stay."

THE END

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