

IMAGINATION

*Stories
of Science
and Fantasy*

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HOLD ONTO YOUR BODY!

By

Richard O. Lewis

**People do strange things—an example,
committing suicide for no apparent reason.
Unless it's time for a change of identity!**

“FIDWELL,” I said, “why don't you go lose yourself!”

He stared at me uncomprehendingly for a full three seconds. Then a glimmer of understanding leaped into his beady little eyes and he got up from the chair before my desk and started happily toward the outer door of the office.

“Okay, Mr. Nelson,” he said over a thin shoulder. “Just whatever you say.”

“Better still,” I amended, tapping the glass top of my desk with manicured nails, “go shoot yourself.”

He nodded blithely. “Just as you say, T. J. Just as you say.” He always called me T. J. when he felt that I was giving him a measure of attention.

“Wait,” I said, as he reached

the door. “Do you by any chance own a gun?”

He turned, a frown spreading between his mousy brows. “No,” he said, slowly, “I don't.” Then he brightened. “But I could purchase one!”

“Fine,” I said, tossing him a bill. “Buy a couple bullets for it, too.”

He caught the money, smiled, nodded, and left—closing the door softly and respectfully behind him.

Humming a merry little tune, I turned to the papers upon my desk. The partnership contract between James Fidwell and T. J. Nelson. *If one of the partners should die from any cause, the other partner would become sole owner of the Remey Company . . .*

They seemed quite in order. I shuffled them into a neat pile and



cut an intricate little dance step on my way to the files with them. The partnership was soon to reach a happy culmination.

Suicide has it all over murder, you know. No silly questions from the police. No mess to clean up. No body to get rid of. (The relatives usually take care of all that.) No bother at all, really.

I skipped back to the desk, flipped up the telephone, and be-

gan poking a finger into the little holes in the dial.

"Mr. Pasquamine?" I chimed, after hearing the faint click at the other end of the wire.

"Yes."

"This is T. J., I said, chummily. "You still own that block of floating stock in the Remy Company, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Fine! Fine!" I complimented.

"Bring it over to my office as soon as possible. And, by the way," I added, casually, "have it transferred to my name, you know."

"Yes."

He was in my office in less than an hour, his fat hulk sweating and panting in the chair before my desk, the heavy lids drooping over his black eyes. The stocks were piled neatly before me. I thumbed through them. They seemed to be quite in order. I skipped across the room to the files with them.

"Pasquamine," I said, returning to my desk and handing him a cheap cigar, "do you by chance own a gun?"

He shook his fat head. "No."

"Do you have at home, perchance, a rope?" I glanced at his obese body. "A good stout one?"

"No."

"A knife, perhaps? A good sharp one?"

His oily face beamed quickly. "Ah, Mr. Nelson! That I have! Sharp for the salami!" He kissed his thick fingers and made a flipping motion into the air with them. "Sharp for the good big salami!"

"Excellent!" I nodded quick approbation. "Go home and cut your throat with it."

HE pushed his hulk up from the chair and walked toward the door.

"And don't bother about coming back to the office afterwards," I admonished.

He paused, hand on the knob, and turned. Then his round face lighted up. "Ah, Mr. Nelson!" he chuckled. "You make with the joke!"

"Sure." I smiled. "And now you go home and make with the knife."

That was the last time I saw Pasquamine. Except at the funeral, of course. He made a lovely corpse—considering everything.

It was the day following the funeral when there came a gentle tapping at my office door.

"Come in," I said, tossing the half-finished bottle of gin back into the lower drawer.

They didn't bother about opening the door; they just crawled under it. A moment later, they had slithered across the floor, had wiggled their way up to the top on my desk, and had flattened out upon its polished surface in complete pseudopod relaxation. Gyf and Gyl. My two very good friends.

"Sorry, boys," I said, after we had exchanged the usual amenities, "that I had to get rid of your symbiotics in such a messy fashion. But business is business, you know; and I felt that the time was right . . ."

Gyf shrugged gelatinously. "I

was getting tired of occupying Fidwell, anyway," he vibrated. "Regular old pussyfoot. Never had no fun."

Gyl burped resoundingly in the middle. "I hope the next body I get doesn't turn out to be another wine-guzzling, garlic eater." A tremor ran through him. "It upsets me frightfully."

"Time and the rising tide of accidents will tell," I soothed.

"I'm cold," trembled Gyl, "since I ain't got no body to keep me warm."

"You might try my secretary," I offered, playfully. "There's a body for you!"

"You know I can't," he vibrated. "She ain't even dead yet!"

"Nearest thing to it," I commented, "this side of the precinct morgue."

That brought a shake of mirth from Gyl who really has a truly remarkable sense of humor.

Gyl, ignoring the levity, slid over to the little intercom box at one side of the desk, crawled in through one of the slits, curled up, and promptly went to sleep. It seems that Fidwell, along with his other faults, had also been a sufferer of insomnia.

"I suppose," I said to Gyl, conversationally, "you'll be wanting a new body now . . ."

"Not necessarily. Not right away." He edged away from the

blotter my desk fan was blowing in his direction. "Want to wait—" A burp nearly flipped him again. "—until these garlic fumes effervesce more completely from my system."

"It worked out wonderfully well, though," I said, "even though you did have to put up with the garlic for awhile." I brought out the gin bottle from the lower drawer. "It was certainly fortunate that Gyl was on hand to occupy Fidwell just after his wife murdered him." I unstoppered the bottle and raised it to my lips. "To Fidwell, departed partner and erstwhile owner of the Remy Company!"

"And the joke was on Mrs. Fidwell," sparkled Gyl's sense of humor. "Just imagine: seeing her husband up walking around, hale and hearty, just a half hour after she had throttled the life out of him with her own two hands!"

"No wonder she had to be locked up," I chuckled, pouring a few drops of gin on the polished glass near my companion.

"My getting the body of Pasquamine, owner of the floating stock, wasn't so bad either," he reminded me, isolating a drop of gin and flowing around it.

I admitted the fact.

"He nearly crushed me, too, when he tumbled," Gyl reminded. "I'd been following him two weeks,

waiting for his fat heart to do a flopperoo."

We both laughed. I took another drink, and Gyl osmosed a nip.

FINALLY, I leaned across the desk. "Listen, Gyl," I said, coldly serious. "Now that this little deal is over, how would you like to get in on something else? Something really *big*?"

He instantly became all ears. (Naturally, only a pseudopod can do it.)

"After I sell out Remey," I continued, "we'll have ample funds. So-o, if we moved over to Washington, D. C. . . . If you and Gyl could get in touch with a couple tottering congressmen who are about ready to depart from this vale of tears . . ."

Gyl caught on immediately. "T. J.," he complimented, "you've *got* something!"

He fell silent, and I knew he was letting the gin and the thought trickle through him, savoring both from various angles. Then he vibrated, dreamily, "I've always wanted to be a congressman. Or— or a cabinet member. Or—" His vibration dropped to little more than a whisper. "—or a *president*!"

"Sorry," I said, "but I believe he is already possessed."

Gyl flowed around another drop

of gin. "Oh, well," he said dismissing the ambition, "guess he doesn't have much to say about things, anyway." Then he brightened. "But there are some mighty fine bureaus and departments there. We could wiggle our way into one of those. A few million dollars here and there wouldn't be missed."

"Atta boy! I'll take you and Gyl over to Washington in the morning, then I'll come back here and dispose of the business while the two of you are getting established." It sounded like a good idea. Within a few years we'd be rolling in the filthy stuff.

I poured a few more drops of gin on the glass top, then raised the bottle. "Here's to happy days in the Pentagon!" I toasted.

Our spirits were soon soaring to great heights, and, as usual under such circumstances, Gyl began talking about the "good old days" when you could pick up a likely corpse almost anywhere, anytime.

"Used to be so much simpler then," he commented, flowing around one of the fresh drops. "Now you have to beat the embalmer!" He chuckled. "Fairly close race at times, too! But it keeps one on one's pseudotoes, so to speak!" A combined burp and hiccough nearly flopped him off the desk.

After he had regained his equilibrium we spent an enjoyable

half-hour talking of cadavers, funeral homes, the comparative merits of inhabiting youthful or wealthy bodies, and other delightfully stimulating subjects. Then we began to sing songs, old and new.

We had finished the chorus of "We Have All the Dough of Remy" for the third time and were just getting warmed up on an extemporization of "We'll Carry On in the Pentagon" when the office door flew suddenly open and two Federal boys stepped in, followed by my stupid-looking secretary.

They came quickly to the desk. One of them grabbed a handful of Gyl with one hand and pointed a gun at me with the other. "Just stay as you are," the officer cautioned.

My dumb secretary stared at me with round, innocent eyes. "I couldn't help hearing everything you said, Mr. Nelson," she chirped, half apologetically. "Your intercom box was open. Must be a short in it somewhere. Or a loose connection . . ."

The other officer picked up the little box and shook it. A surprised Gyl felt out from between

the slats . . .

THEY have Gyl and Gyl in a little bottle now, tightly stoppered and ready for shipment back home to Venus. They'll be placed on the next space ship heading out.

There is a stupid Terrestrial law, you know, which makes it mandatory that all Venusians be apprehended on sight or extracted from any body they may be occupying and sent back to Venus in all possible haste.

And so I shall soon be extracted from the body of T. J. Nelson and his neck will bend double in the middle again just the way it was when I found him shortly after his accident. Then, in a little bottle of my own, I shall accompany Gyl and Gyl homeward.

But, don't worry, I'll be back! I'll be back just as soon as I can hitch a ride on a returning spaceboat!

So take good care of yourself, my friend, and don't catch pneumonia or step in front of a truck or anything like that—*until I return.*

THE END