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By JOHN RACKHAM

IDEA MAN

Illustrated by DILLON

ACCORDING to this morning's paper, Arthur Penfold stands a good chance of being in the next Honours List. Sir Arthur — and I knew him when he was a nobody, when he was a third-rate putterer, working in the electronic back-room laboratory research of Ferdinand's Radio and Television. We had a lot in common, he and I, that day we met. He'd had a bright idea, and fumbled it, and he had been sacked.

The same thing had happened to me.

He, having no idea what to do next, had gravitated to a little pub at the end of the road where he had spent most of his working life. I had followed my nose there, too — and there the resemblance ends. Ideas are my stock in trade, and I had plenty of ideas what to do next. My search for beer was to drown a strong sense of injustice.

Who wouldn't? I mean, if you'd

*The saddest words of all are
these: I work my head to the
bone and he takes the glory!*

uncorked a twenty-four-carat, jeweled-in-every-hole idea, and seen someone else muff it, like a mutton head — and then been blamed for the whole thing — wouldn't you? It's bad enough when a cracker of an idea goes sour, but to have him blame *me* for it!

"You're fired!" Robel had said. "You're an idea man. You should have thought of this and you didn't. You're fired!"

As if I could foresee everything! All right, *I am* an idea man, and don't ever let anybody sell you the idea that ideas sell themselves — they don't. That old line about building a better mousetrap just isn't so. Getting ideas is tough. Getting them sold, at a profit, is what separates the dreamers from the doers. And getting blamed for somebody else's goof — that was the end!

So I was boiling. There's six foot three of me, square, and none of it fat, so, when I boil, it looks sort of scary. Not that I was thinking of anything like that when I shoved my way into this pub. I was making resolutions. Never again, I thought. Next time I get a good idea, I'll push it, promote it, and profit from it myself. And I ran into Penfold, never dreaming that there was my next time waiting for me.

I could cry, just thinking of it. Penfold the magnificent, the famous, the lion of the day — and I

had it all right in my hand, and I dropped it! Me—William S. Bright — idea man!

I T began, as I suppose all such things do, in the most banal way. Robel had sent for me, to give me my weekly pep talk. George Robel, my boss — Robel's Rib Ticklers, The Famous Firm for Fun, jokes and jests, gags and gadgets for all occasions — a household word. George Robel, a fat and balding Napoleon type, employed four idea men. We knew of each other, but never met. We avoided each other like the plague, scared of plagiarism. And he gave each one of us a going over once a week.

"Ah, Bright!" he said, from behind his desk. "We haven't been very Bright, this week, have we, Bright? We will have to do much better, won't we, otherwise our prospects won't be very Bright, will they?" And so on, with all the variations. I think it was sheer self-defense against the cracks about my name which made me become an expert on ideas in the first place. I'm often asked, "Where do you get your ideas from?" — and I could quote a well-known author on that. "If I knew that," he said, "I'd go back for more!" But you can't talk like that to your employer. So I just let him talk himself dry.

Coming out, I intercepted a knowing sneer from the girl in the outer office.

"Well, well, Mr. Bright," she cooed nastily. "Been neglecting your homework, again?"

I stopped and leaned on her desk. "When I'm around you, Joyce, honey," I told her, "there's only one kind of homework I can think of!" This was nasty of me, because she was a girl with almost too much of everything — and terribly self-conscious about it.

"Surely," she snapped right back, "you can't mean that? Not me, the girl who's all shape and no brains — remember?"

Which was fair. As I said, having ideas is not enough. Joyce had one hundred per cent perfect eidetic recall. Let her see or hear a thing just once and she had it for always. So her head must have been as full of ideas as her dress was full of her — but she had no idea what to do with them. She didn't have the wit to use her talents, even, until I sold her to Robel as a cheap, efficient and mobile filing cabinet. That was just one of my ideas which had paid off, and for which he was grateful for a whole week. And I had made rude references to her brain-power from time to time since.

"Who cares about what's inside?" I leered, keeping the gag rolling. "With what you've got on the outside, it wouldn't matter if you were hollow—"

And it happened — a beautiful, big, bright idea — just like that! I

was all on edge as I turned and staggered back into Robel's office.

"Get out!" he said. "Go back to work. I'm busy!"

"I've go it!" I mumbled dazedly, "Got a cracker of an idea—"

"Stay in!" he said in exactly the same tone. "Sit down. There. Talk!"

"Pinups!" I said, and his bushy eyebrows went up. "Life-size!" I added, and the brows lowered again.

"Been done," he snorted, but I hadn't finished yet.

"Inflatable — plastic — balloons?"

HE took his pudgy hands off the desk and sat quite still. I could see the glow spreading over him.

"By George, Bright, I think you have something there!" he said, and shut his eyes. "Perfectly detailed copies, colored, life-size — and inflatable — fold away in a drawer, pack flat for mail orders — sounds right. Who should we model?"

He was fast, once he started, but I was just ahead of him there.

"Tina Teton," I suggested, "very up and coming, out to make herself a name, but not in the star class yet. Known but not famous, if you get me. She'd be willing and she wouldn't cost too much."

You see what I mean? You have to *sell* an idea. I knew that Robel went for the risqué so long as it

wasn't risky, so I had him from that angle. Robel has a string of items that never get in any catalogues. The grapevine sells them, just as it would sell this. Take, for instance, an item I'll bet you never saw in print, a very fashionable pair of unmentionables, complete with frills and lace — the elastic is guaranteed to hold up for one hour — then body heat does something to the formula, and you get your kicks.

That can be bought, if you know how, and plenty people do, it seems. And they'd be the ones who'd go for this, so I knew Robel would like it. But, for my sins, I also knew him as a hard man with the pennies. Thus Tina Teton.

"All right!" Robel said briskly. "I'll handle this. Just a minute." He flipped his desk buzzer. "Joyce, come in here!"

This was routine. I would recite the gist of my idea to her; she would blink, think, then tell me where and when she'd seen, heard or read of it before; I would hate her intestines, and go away to try again. But not this time.

"It's new to me," she told him. For me, she added, "Trust you to think up a disgusting idea like that."

"You're my inspiration," I told her, and, as another spark lit up, I said, "See here, Mr. Robel — it might be a lot cheaper if you only had to get Tina Teton's name and

maybe her head. Joyce, here, could model the body—!"

That repaid me for all the dirty cracks, and a bit over. The next few weeks were hectic. Joyce was livid when she found that she had to be smothered in plaster, and broken out, like a chicken from its shell. She screamed so loud that Robel actually gave her a percentage of the net profit to shut up.

I was highly unpopular around the office, but that was no change.

WITHIN a week after that, we had a thousand units from the first trial run and were standing by for the flood. We sold four. Six weeks later, the number had swelled to nine, and I was in the office again. I guessed what for, and I had insurance — an idea I'd been hoarding just for some such moment. It was a string of cut-plastic jewels with a miniature light inside each one, and a hearing-aid battery built into the clasp. With a bi-metallic "flasher" to make it light up and switch off automatically — a novelty — no girl with any taste would be seen dead with one, but Robel didn't sell to that kind, anyway. It softened his anger a little — but not much.

"A flop," he growled. "You and your life-size balloons. Not so Bright, after all—" He had one standing by his desk as he spoke, and, standing as close as that to



it, I didn't wonder nobody wanted to buy. It scared me, somehow. With a picture on the wall, you know it's a picture. But this thing was so real you could damn near see it breathe.

I was mumbling something about being sorry, which I wasn't, when one of our peddlers came in, and I was privileged to listen in on the conversation. He made a big thing out of the hard work he'd put in, trying to sell the balloons—and something else.

"One chap," he said, "seemed interested in the process — the idea itself. I think he has the notion that with a change here and there, plus a bit of know-how, he might be able to sell it—"

"Better than we can, eh?"

"I doubt it, Mr. Robel, but he was interested in buying the rights."

"Price?"

"Well, he's only a small man—he suggested five hundred."

"Double — in cash." The telephone came into play, and there was some terse bargaining. In the end, we lost Tina Teton, in effigy, for seven hundred and fifty pounds, and Robel was able to use one of his precious stock of smiles.

"I forgive you, Bright," he said. "Apparently there are others who aren't very bright either!"

One month later, to the day, the blow fell. Braced for my routine dressing-down, because a man can't

have new ideas all the time, I entered the office, and Robel practically hit me in the face with a copy of a trade journal.

This not-very-bright "small" man had taken our idea — *my* idea — and given it a golden twist. Using a quick-setting plastic and a spray-on, peel-off technique, he was producing and supplying — by the thousand — shop-window dummies! It was so obvious I could have kicked myself. The rag trade was falling over itself to get them — all sizes and colorings and attitudes — lifelike, easy to store, easy to handle, and cheap. You glued a pair of shoes to a heavy base, inserted the feet before inflating, and they stood steady enough to wear clothes. There was even a mention of future developments — a personal-copy service, for do-it-yourself dressmaking. This guy had thought of everything.

Robel was livid in a deadly, cold way.

"You're fired!" he said. "You're an idea man. You should have thought of this and you didn't. You're fired!"

AND that was how I came to be at the bar of the Dog and Pullet on a Friday afternoon—and met Penfold. If there'd been anyone else in the place, I'd never have noticed him. He was that sort of person then. Small, ineffectual, helpless-looking, and a mumbler. I

bet that's all changed now, but at the time I was in no mood to care.

"Have one on me, friend," I told him. "Whatever it is, have another. Join me in celebrating my emancipation from the yoke of servitude. A slave no longer, Billy Bright now works for Billy Bright!"

"Lost your job?" he asked dully. "Me, too — just been sacked."

"Makes two of us. What did you do?"

"Oh, nothing much." He gloomed into his glass. "You might say I had an idea — and my chief liked the sound of it — so I worked on it — and it didn't turn out the way he expected — so he gave me the sack."

"But that's *my* story," I marveled. "Word for word — exactly what fate did to me. That's what it is — Kismet." My intuition was into top gear, straight off. I knew, somehow, that this was fate's repayment for the dirty deal I'd just been handed. I escorted him to a table, sat him down and bade him tell all.

"It's something I've been working on, on my own time, for more than ten years," he mumbled. "About a year ago I began to get some interesting results, so I went to Mr. Ferdinand, my chief, and told him, and he was impressed." He took time out to tell me that he was an electronics technologist, working for Ferdinands, that he spent all his spare time in his back

room, fiddling about on a theory.

I was practically foaming at the mouth by the time I interrupted. "What was the idea, for heaven's sake?"

"Matter transmission," he said timidly, as if he expected me to throw something at him. I didn't. I was too busy coughing back the part of my drink that had gone down the wrong way.

"Matter transmission?" I choked. "Sending material objects by radio waves?"

"You know about it, then?"

"Man, it's as old as the hills!"

"Oh." He looked quite worried. "I didn't know it had been done."

"Outside the pages of fiction, Arthur," I told him sorrowfully, "it has not, nor ever will be. I don't wonder your boss gave you the heave-ho, if that is what you were trying to sell him. Matter transmission, hah!" I sat there shaking my head and wondering what had gone wrong with the old "feel," that it could let me in for a nut like this.

"But I did it!" he insisted. "That is, I did it — in a sort of a way. Mr. Ferdinand — he was like you, at first — until I showed him some of my results, and figures — and then he was different. 'Penfold,' he said to me, 'I believe you might have something there. You carry on with it — on your own time, of course — but work on it!' So I did. And this morning I went to see

him with my very latest results—"

"And he shot you out on your ear — for perfecting a method of matter transmission?"

PENFOLD looked sullen. "It wasn't perfect — not to his way of thinking. He expected me to be able to transmit solid objects—"

"Hold it, now," I interrupted again. "That's what I would have expected, too. You mean your gadget won't—"

"Of course not."

"Then what the hell . . . Pardon me. What does it transmit?"

"Matter, of course!" he said. "That's all any sane person would expect!" He was beginning to boil now. "Take this glass, for instance. Its shape is the end result of a number of factors — structural stresses, chemical bonds, surface tension — forming a three-dimensional spatial pattern. None of that is electrical, so how can you expect to transmit it?"

"Damned if I know," I confessed. "You're the genuis. What do you send?"

"Molecules, of course," he said witheringly, as if I should have known that for myself. "The applied field breaks down the material form into its elementary molecules — dispersing all the mechanico-chemical components— and then the molecules, which are purely electronic values, are converted into radio-type patterns.

These are transmitted, and received, reconverted, in the receiving unit. You see?"

"So," I said, "if you shoved this glass into your gadget, it would come out at the other end as a heap of silica and stuff?"

"That's right." He nodded. "Only I'd have to powder the glass first. My apparatus doesn't develop a field strong enough to break down a structure as rigid as this."

"That's a pity." I put down the glass. "For a moment there, I thought you had maybe the makings of a disintegrator."

"What's a disintegrator?"

"You're strictly a one-idea man, aren't you, Arthur? A disintegrator is something you don't see which makes something you do see into something you don't see. See?" He didn't, of course, and I was wasting my time. "But," I went on to point out, "your gadget is crazier than that. Who'd want to send a pinch of powder anywhere?"

"That was Mr. Ferdinand's complaint," he mumbled sorrowfully. "He was expecting something quite different — and he used the same words. 'Pinch of dust!' he said. 'What's the use of that? I can do better with ordinary television. At least I can send and receive a recognizable picture!' So we got into an argument and he sacked me."

And it happened! Again! A real

H-bomb of an idea this time — so big that it scared me stiff, and all my brakes went on full.

"Arthur," I said very softly. "Arthur Penfold, I think I've got the solution to your problem, but I want to be absolutely sure before I get your hopes up. Let me ask a few questions. First, do you still have the gadget? I mean, in full working order — and it's all yours — not made of spare parts from the firm, or anything like that?"

HE went a shade of pink that would have alarmed a doctor. "Damn right it's all mine, and in working order! I have it at home, in my back room, just as Mr. Ferdinand saw it! Why?"

"And I can see it with my own eyes?" I asked urgently.

"I don't see why not." He began to catch something of the fever that was burning me. "I say, do you think there's anything important about it? Mr. Ferdinand didn't seem to think very much of it—"

"That's what I'm counting on, Arthur. You see, I think I have the order of events right this time. This is a stupendous idea and somebody else has had first crack at it and slipped up — so it's my turn to come in second and reap the harvest. This time it can't go wrong!"

He looked dubious. "I don't see what's so wonderful about it. An

interesting phenomenon, yes — and possible developments, perhaps — but what's *your* bright idea — er, I beg your pardon. No offense, I hope?"

"Think nothing of it." I brushed it to one side. "I'm used to that. The idea? It's big — biggest thing I ever fell into, but this time I'm going to play it carefully. This time I'm digging out the snags *first*, if there are any — and that's all I'm going to say until I've actually seen this thing with my own two eyes."

So we went, by bus, and I saw. His stuff was all scrambled about, crazily, in a stuffy back room that was a death trap of looping wires, naked terminals, milk bottles by the dozen, and several Pisa-like stacks of slices of stale bread. Penfold, with apologies, explained that he used milk bottles as collector units, because they were all of a standard size, and bread as his experimental transmission material because it was cheap, handy and the right kind of texture.

And he showed me. I'm no genius at electronics, but you have to know a smattering in my line, so I could recognize transformers and coils — some really tortuous ones, in vacuum tubes — and a mess of wiring that tangled my eyes just to look at. But the thing that really mattered — the focal point, as it were — was on the end of the bench, and it looked exactly

like an old-fashioned fishbowl. It was a fishbowl, with a copper-wire tripod inside, and some trimmings, connected to the rest of the hook-up.

"Watch!" he said, switching things on here and there. After a few clicks and a hum or two, I saw a bright blue haze spread itself like a little table cloth on the tripod. He took a slice of bread and crumbled it into the bowl, and it fizzed a little, then lay in a thin layer, on the blue haze. And that was that.

"It hasn't gone anywhere," I observed, and he snorted.

"Of course it hasn't. There isn't anywhere for it to go!"

"But in all the stories, it just vanishes — and there it is, presto, in the cabinet thing. Where's your cabinet?"

"Fiction! Look here—" There was quite a transformation in Arthur now. This was his stamping ground and he was thoroughly disgusted with my ignorance. "Let me make this quite clear, Bright. This is not radio, although analogous to it in many ways — frequency and wave-length characteristics, for instance. But in other ways it resembles ordinary, everyday electric current..."

HE launched into a highly technical exposition, which didn't do anything for me at all, and it must have showed on my face, be-

cause, after a few minutes, he switched off.

"Oh, dear," he sighed. "Look, suppose I took a length of insulated wire, bared one end, and stuck it in that socket there — what would happen?"

"There would be a big blue flash and all the lights would go out?"

"No! Good gracious, don't you know *anything*? Nothing would happen — nothing at all — until I grounded the other end. The juice must have somewhere to go. It's the same with this. The molecular substance cannot go anywhere until I provide it with a ground."

He was talking to me like a child now, which was a laugh, as there was enough of me to make four of him, easy — but I didn't mind. I was watching what he did. He took a dinky little gadget out of a drawer and fitted it on to the top of a milk bottle. It looked like shiny black bakelite, like a collar, and there was a fine wire grid across the hole, and a button on the side.

"Now watch!" he said, and pressed the button. There was a quiet sizzle, and the bottle was about one-third full of a fine white mist. It began to settle. And the bread crumbs had gone from the fish bowl, from one end of the bench to the other, without any visible connection. All of six feet.

It looked all right. But I was cautious.

"I'd like to see that again," I told him.

Then I was in trouble. I wanted to have the "go" and the "come back" effects properly separated, and to watch them both at the same time. It couldn't be done. In the end, I had to compromise. I put the bread crumbs in by myself, and I held the milk bottle, and switched on the collector by myself — with him by my side all the time — and it still worked.

Still with my brakes on, I asked, "But how do you know it will work with anything else? Have you tried?"

"What did you have in mind?" he asked.

"A piece of coal, for instance."

Well, he looked at me as if I'd lost my mind, but we did it. Chunk of coal in there — black haze of molecular carbon and stuff out here, among the bread powder. I began to ache with the effort to hold back my enthusiasm. This was it, all right. I couldn't find a thing wrong with it. But hold on a bit . . .

"How about liquids?" I demanded, and he was puzzled for a minute.

"Shouldn't make any difference," he decided, and came back with a jug of water.

I came right up on my toes with fright as he sloshed about half a pint into the bowl, all over that power-haze — but nothing hap-

pened. It just lay there, in mid-air, quietly.

Before I could get my breath back, he said, "We can try it at a slightly longer range, if you like. I have only a limited power source, but it should carry as far as the next room, at least." And he marched out of his clutter, with me hot-footing after him. Standing in his little bed-sitting room, I thought of that power angle.

"That's a point!" I said. "It uses a hell of a lot of wattage, doesn't it?"

DAMN it, there had to be a snag somewhere — it was too good. But he shook his head gently.

"No. So far as I can detect, there is almost no power drain on the transmission. There is a hefty power investment in setting up the original field, of course, but it is all returned when the field is broken down again. As a matter of fact, that was one of my biggest troubles. I had no way of handling all that return current —"

"Never mind," I told him. "Not now — I can't bear it. Just let me try this last experiment."

I grabbed the bottle from him and pressed the button. Immediately, I had a bottle full of gray-black mud, which filled up and lifted off the collector collar. It fizzed down to the floor, jetting a spurt of fine mist, and I stood there with the filthy stuff drooling down

over my hands — and I gloated.

He began to go off excitedly about something, and it was quite a while before I realized just what.

"The hell with the carpet, man!" I cried. "What does a carpet matter when you have the world in your lap? Wealth, fame, prestige, power — all shall be yours, Arthur! Just let me handle this and you'll be a hero of science — a Nobel Prize-winner — an immortal!"

But he kept right on about that lousy carpet, and what his landlady would say, and it took me a lot of work to get him to sit down and listen — and to promise, first, that he would let me be the master mind in charge. Then I wrapped it all up in one word and gave it to him:

Rockets!

Now it was his turn to look blank and for me to feel superior, but I hadn't time for that. I had to get it across to him — to sell it.

"Listen, I said. "Preparations are being made for a manned satellite, and then a Moon trip, a trip to Venus, Mars — and who's doing it all? America and Russia. Why? Because rocketry is a super-colossal-expensive business. Why is Britain out of it? Because we can't afford it. Do we want to be in on it? Of course we do. Even Royalty has been heard to express some concern because Britain is lagging behind. Isn't that so?"

He had to nod there, because it

was all true, but he was puzzled.

"What does this have to do with rocketry?" he mumbled.

"You know what the biggest headache is in rocketry? It's fuel! A rocket just devours fuel — and it has to lift and carry all its fuel with it, and fuel is weight — and the more fuel you carry, the more weight you carry, and the more fuel you need to lift the weight, until it takes more fuel to lift the weight of fuel than you have fuel to lift the weight. Are you getting the picture now?"

"That part, yes. But what does my—"

"This gadget of yours will end that. No need to design for fuel tanks at all any more — or to allow for the weight of it! You transmit it as required! Can you imagine it? And it's for Britain, boy! This will put us away out in front in the space race. Just wait until the Space Travel Commission hears of this, or the Interplanetary Exploration Board, or the Rocket Experimental Office, or whatever they all it. Just wait — you'll see their eyes light up!"

WELL, we had ourselves a great evening, I can tell you. But the weeks that followed were such as try the soul. Would you believe it, there isn't a Space Travel Commission, or an Interplanetary Exploration Board, or anything like it in this benighted

country? There isn't even an authorized body for carrying out rocket tests! So far as I could make out, the only people doing anything with rockets are the firework manufacturers. And the civil law—well, I'd rather not dwell on that, if you don't mind. There was only the military left—and who wants to tangle with them in any country?

But that's what it came to in the end. We were out of money, for one thing. I soon ran through my little pile, and Penfold didn't have much—we were both out of a job, remember. So I had to go ask Joyce for a loan. I didn't have much hope of her, but she surprised me. She had managed to hang on to her rights and was taking a sizeable percentage of the window-model business. She wouldn't lend money, though. She bought into Penfold instead. And I thought she was stupid!

And, at last, the day came. We had kept everything as hush-hush as possible, but you can't kill rumors about such things as the verified and signed experimental transmission of five hundred gallons of fuming nitric acid from one end to the other of a carefully watched and guarded air strip somewhere in the West Country.

So we foregathered with a very impressed, and impressive, committee of VIPs—lots of gold braid, oak leaves, eggheads, senior civil

servants, and a cabinet minister or two, plus a swarm of experts and consultants—and Penfold and me.

It had been tested and considered and debated ad nauseam, and this was the final formality. The Government was going to buy rights in our very nice baby and nurse it for us. We were made!

We all sat ourselves at a long table, ready to work ourselves tired signing a lot of papers.

An undersecretary of some kind began serving out sheafs of forms to all and sundry. There was a barrage of rustling, coughing, spectacle-case poppings—lips moved and twitched silently—mutterers muttered. Somebody walloped the table with a gavel. We came to order..

Then a beefy, red-faced merchant got up, not far from me, with a funny look on his face.

"My Lord—" he said, then coughed. "I beg your pardon—Mr. Chairman." It was a gaffe, the kind of procedural gaffe you don't hear at a meeting like this, and it had everyone by the ear in a minute. Dead silence. "May I draw attention to page three, second paragraph, of the proposal, wherein there is a definitive description of Mr. Penfold's device?" He hemmed a couple of times, and then read carefully, "—hum—hum—operating by the transmission of molecular energies between two termini in harmonic correspon-

dence with each others; i.e., matching in frequency and wave length, in a manner analogous with conventional long-wave radio transmission and reception—”

He stopped to clear his throat.

“I would emphasize the term ‘long-wave’—”

You could have cut the quiet with a cleaver.

Then he said, “If I may ask — what about the Heaviside Layer?”

It was murder. Because of the Geophysical Year, even I had heard of the Heaviside Layer and Van Allen radiation belts and the like, and I knew that long-wave stuff bounces off — it doesn’t go through. I got a momentary flash of our rocket bellowing up and going *phut* — out of juice, just beyond the ionosphere — and I wanted to die right there. Lord knows why I had taken it for granted that Penfold’s stuff was ultra-short-wave, but I had, and so had everybody else, until red-face spotted it.

IT was the end, of course. All over. I believe they shooed us out gently. I’m not too sure. I was too ruined, mentally, to take much notice.

The next clear memory I have is of Penfold and me slumped in a little pub, just the other side of Admiralty Arch, wondering what had hit us. The way Penfold was looking at me, I could see that it

was going to happen again. It was going to be all my fault.

But just as he was drawing a big breath, ready to let fly, we were interrupted by a tall, thin guy, with a hairline mustache, slick hair, and the kind of suit you see only in Bond Street ads.

“May I join you?” he asked, and sat, all in one motion. “I was a member of that committee. I’m sorry it all came to nothing. It must have been a severe blow for you chaps.”

“A blow?” Penfold sounded as if he might cry any minute. “The blow happened when I first met him! I should never have listened to a word he said. I don’t know what I shall do now. I’m out of a job, broke, in debt, disgraced, my professional reputation ruined—”

“I’m sorry,” the stranger said. “Perhaps I can help. My name is Parker. I think your idea has possibilities, Mr. Penfold. Of course, it will need a lot of work done on it, and modifications. I think you need a new partner, perhaps, and some financial backing. I would like to buy in.”

“Nothing to buy,” I told him bitterly. “He says *he’s* in debt. That’s a laugh. *I’m* the one who’s gone into hock for this thing!”

“Very well,” he said. “What would it take to cover your debts, plus a little something for your trouble, in return for your share?”

“Well, now—” I thought, fast.

"Five hundred will get me out of the red—and, say, a thousand for my share?"

Penfold's eyes nearly bugged out of their sockets at this. "A thousand pounds?" he screamed. "You have the cheek to ask this man — a perfect stranger — to give you a thousand pounds for *nothing*?"

But Parker wasn't paying him any attention. He was busy with a very nice-looking cheque book. I had one little quiver of uncertainty as I put out my hand for that pretty slip of paper — but it died, and I took it. And I cashed it.

And that's the last I ever saw of Arthur Penfold. That was three years ago. You know the rest. He belongs to the world now. Everybody has heard of the Penfold-Parker Power Pack.

WHY didn't I think of it? Why didn't I remember that cars, lorries, trucks, motorbikes, buses, trains, diesel engines, aircraft and motorboats — and big liners — all use fuel? You know how it is now.

You hire a Power Pack, with a meter on it — you clip it on to the fuel feed of your car or whatever — and you pay what it reads on the meter, the end of the month, into your nearest Penfold-Parker office. There's one in every large town, here and overseas. Pretty soon the only engines with fuel tanks will be those in the museums.

Why didn't I think of it?

Ideas—I've got a million of 'em, as Durante used to say. For instance, if you live all alone, as I do, you'll know what it is to want to heat up a tin of beans. You have to mess about with a pan, waste time heating up the water. There's no need. Just punch a small hole in the top of the tin, stick a bit of cellophane tape over it, and put the tin on a single flame. When the heat and pressure are right, the tape will burst. Pressure-cooker principle, get me?

You don't? You'd rather have a girl like Joyce cook for you? Funny, so did Arthur — he married her.

Now why didn't I think of that?

— JOHN RACKHAM

