

# COSMOS SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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# I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW

By BEN SMITH

"WAIT," Henry Bitts said. They were in front of a pawnshop and Henry stood there, the new camera slung from his shoulder, his eyes unfocused, peering into some greater distance. Duane Morton paused, outwardly patient. "You said you had it figured out," he prompted.

"Yes," Henry touched his tongue to dry lips, conscious of the rather seedy reflection of a little man that faced him in the pawnshop window. It had been a wonderful thing—the new Speed-Graphic bought from a year's savings, the job with the bunch at the *Globe*, the friendship of Duane Morton.

The two wonderful things in Henry's world, Duane and Dorothy. . . .

Henry was unconscious of Morton's impatience as his mind turned over the hours of the past year as if they had been the pages in a book. The first and greatest scene, of course, was the memory of the day when Dorothy had agreed to marry him. Of all

the men she had known . . . Duane . . . Halley . . . Shorty, the entire staff of the *Globe*, she had chosen an inoffensive little man who made a sometimes living in a photography shop. Henry Bitts caught his breath because the recollection was edged with pain.

"You have a knack for photography," Dorothy had said and Henry felt again the urgency in her voice. It had been a warm night so long ago and Dorothy had been sweetly desirable in her short-sleeved linen frock. It had been a night for dreaming and Dorothy had been the foundation for his dream. A knack for photography Henry Bitts might have, but not a knack for making money, and Dorothy's linen dress and all the other beautiful clothes she bought back when she had been working soon became shabby. It was then that Henry had taken what little money they had and bought the camera. After that, Halley gave him a job.

"Halley is a good guy," Mor-

ton's voice brought Henry back to the present. "He'll take you back after he gets over his mad spell."

"No," Henry shook his rather narrow, balding head regretfully, "there's no chance of that." His eyes, squinted from too many hours under a ruby light, passed over the heterogeny of the pawn shop window. "I told you I had it figured out."

Morton took an impatient step, swinging his broad shoulders irritably. "I'll talk to Halley. . . ."

"No," Henry's thin fingers caught at Morton's tweeded sleeve. "No. It's not on account of me that I hate to get fired. It's Dorothy. You know how women are. Even with me working nights, she had the money to have a good time once in a while. And, you've been a good friend to us, taking her. But, it's me . . . I mean about the pictures. There's something about me that makes a camera act the way it does."

"You're crazy!"

Henry Bitts nodded his head wearily. "I guess I am," he replied and again his mind looked into the past . . .

**T**HAT had been a honey of an angle shot he had worked out. From the roof of the tool

shed obliquely centering upon the rotund figure of the Mayor, presumably doing something important about the new high school's cornerstone. Henry Bitts could again feel the warm touch of the afternoon breeze; he had been on the day trick then; and from below the voices of the spectators had risen in a pleasant murmur. Across the field, so soon to be covered by an educational plant of imposing brick, tall grass undulated. The Mayor had turned, arm upflung, asking for silence, and Henry Bitts had tripped his Speed-Graphic. A beautiful shot.

"Remember that, Mort?" he asked softly and wondered that his voice could remain calm. "I told you about it. But the plate was a washout and Halley thought I had forgotten to remove the lens cover and he kicked me downstairs to the night trick with Shorty."

"But you got a pic," Morton protested, much as if reasoning with a child. "You simply shot too high, Henry, and missed the ceremony. You got an angle view of the field."

"No." Now that Henry Bitts could see the course of the next few moments, he was calm. As calm as Duane Morton. And the suave, dashing *Globe* reporter

was noted for his own level head.

"I've always envied you, Mort," Henry continued quietly. "I wanted to be like you, as much as I could. You made money, you wore good clothes and if you ever married your wife would have the things she wanted. Dorothy . . . she married me, Mort, but, maybe, she should have married you."

Morton interrupted swiftly, his greenish eyes hooded. "Don't talk like that . . ." his words were torn apart by the thunder of a passing bus, the quick whoop of a boy on a bicycle. "You'll drive yourself nuts. Henry, a camera is a piece of machinery and the picture it takes is what the lens sees. What if they did find a bug in the works, something about a condemned sewer, and change their plans about the high school? They had the ceremony, didn't they? And you took a picture, didn't you?"

Henry Bitts felt the last of his uncertainty vanish. Morton, this brawny, handsome, well-dressed and well-paid *Globe* man about town . . . Mort's voice was shaking.

"A piece of machinery?" Henry Bitts' voice was thoughtful. "No. Not with me, Mort. Look at this," he swung his Speed-Graphic before him and

the sunlight winked from the polished chrome. "When I push the release, *something happens!* I took a picture that day at the site of the new high school, Mort. I took other pictures. But, when they were developed . . ." His voice trailed off uncertainly.

"Mort!" Henry's face was white and his throat was dry again. All the fear came flooding back. And the horrible *knowledge*. "I take pictures of things as they will be!"

"Look, Henry. I know a doctor. He'll help you. And Halley . . ."

"Shut up, Mort!"

"Well, O. K." Duane Morton looked through the dingy window of the pawn shop and was suddenly afraid. "Let's go, Henry . . ."

"Not yet." Henry Bitts' voice rose shrilly and a man pushing a street-cleaner's cart looked up, startled. "I take a picture in the morning and when it's developed I wind up with a shot of the same place, *later*. I took a snap of some swans in Richard's Lake, two of them, and when Shorty ran the print through, *there were five*. The young had hatched. Oh, God . . ." There was nothing profane in the tortured word. Henry Bitts' eyes were wet with tears. "Mort, I take pictures of the *future*."

"Easy, Henry," Duane Mor-

ton stepped close, placed an arm across the little man's trembling shoulders. "Easy. It might be a good thing." His lips were stiff with the attempt at jocularly. "Think of the killing you could make at the races. . . ."

"Killing?"

Henry Bitts calmed, suddenly. "Yes." His voice was again almost toneless. "Taking pictures of the future could be very valuable, Mort. It has been to me. I've been working nights for weeks, kind of missed out on what was going on. I can't be blamed, in any way, can I Mort?"

A burly policeman walked by, twirling his night stick. He stopped behind them, his voice thick and Irish. "Your buddy sick, or somethin'?"

"No. No, officer, I'm all right." Henry Bitts waited until the blue uniform was out of sight, his eyes squinted up at Morton, watching the tinge of the big man's exasperation and embarrassment. Henry Bitts even smiled a little. . . .

"I even took a picture of

Dorothy yesterday," he said softly. "Mort, a picture of the future is a handy gadget. She had been out to the grocery and had her hair up in those little metal dofunnies. Before I thought I snapped her as she came in the door. Was *she* mad."

Duane Morton laughed and there was relief in the sound. Henry would be all right, now, he was just kind of a nut, that was all. A kind of a dumb nut. But why was his voice so low, choking out the words?

"I developed the picture, Mort." Henry swung his camera abruptly, rubbing the bright surfaces with his thumb. "You look at it while I go in here. . . ."

And Henry Bitts handed Duane Morton the picture of Dorothy — the picture that, through some unknown alchemy, was of another *time*. The picture that showed a gloriously happy Dorothy clasped in Duane Morton's arms, her full lips to his. . . .

Henry Bitts went into the pawnshop and traded his Speed-Graphic for a gun.

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