

# BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

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# *It's a Gift*

***A spectacular gift and it  
was all Ben's! Or was  
it the other way around?***

**By GEORGE HAYMAN**

**B**EN FINLAY was no scientist and well he knew it. But he *was* a first-rate mechanic — one of the best aircraft assemblers in the big Santa Monica plant. He could figure out anything mechanical. But the Power wasn't mechanical. It just seemed to happen — as if some unseen entity turned it on, like a water faucet.

For three days now, he'd experimented secretly with the mysterious Power. Where it came from, he had no idea. Nor did he know why it had come to reside in his head. One thing was certain—the Power was not complete.

"Somehow, it should work the other way," he mumbled. He worked alone at the bench in his garage. He kept telling himself, "There ought to be another way, just as easy, to unweld them." In his hands, he held two nails, their heads stuck together. He studied them intently.

So far, he'd arrived at two facts. First, he had to be angry about something or at someone before the Power began to operate. And secondly, his eyes had to be pointing in the direction of the metals in order to fuse them together.

As he studied his last experi-

ment, he noticed the battered alarm clock on the bench. It was after three in the afternoon. Ben worked the night shift, 4:00 to 12:30. Alza, his wife, would have a light snack ready for him any minute now. Then he'd have to be traveling.

**S**URE enough, he heard the kitchen door slam and the cocker puppy yapping. Alza was on her way to the garage. Usually, she just called good and loud.

He tried to brush the nails and junk he'd been experimenting with under a box, but without success. As Alza entered, she shooed the cocker away from the hem of her housedress. Ben was healthy and of fairly good size but, compared to his buxom spouse, he appeared shriveled and poorly.

"What's going on out here?" she demanded. "What's all this stuff stuck together?" Then she snorted. "Ben Finlay! Spending money on junk again, thinkin' to make a fortune. Won't you ever get any sense into that head of yours?"

"I haven't spent a dime," he said defensively. He decided he'd better tell her something about the Power, although he knew she'd never understand.

"I've made a great discovery," he said. "We're going to be millionaires."

"You don't say!" Alza frowned. "Well, we can use ten dollars

of that million right now. The collector was here about the television set. I had to give him ten dollars out of the furniture payment."

"Good Lord!" moaned Ben. "When I make that up on payday, there won't be enough left for groceries. At least, not after paying the light bill, and the five dollars for the milk." It always seemed the same. Scheming and scraping — a payment here and a payment there, every payday. "But it won't be long," he said, trying to reassure himself as well. "There's a few details to work out before we can put my idea to work. Then we're in the big money."

"That's usually the way with your inventions," she said. "What's this one? You gotta show me you're not spending any money."

So he told her, in general, how the Power worked, describing many different airplane parts he'd repaired on the job. "I haven't told anyone but you. But the inspectors at the plant are getting a little snoopy. We haven't reported any misdrilled holes the last few days, or any cracked material, or any parts cut too short. I've been fixing them when no one was looking."

**H**E picked up two nails from the pile on the bench and held their heads together. "Here, I'll

show you," he said. Then he concentrated on the lawnmower that wasn't in the garage. "That cheap chiseler next door!" he told himself vehemently. "When is he going to return my lawnmower? Another few weeks, and he'll swear it belongs to him!" His head buzzed ever so slightly. That was enough for just two little nails. The heads were welded together.

"You see, Alza. They're welded — not just around the edge, but all the way through!"

"Don't kid me," she laughed hollowly. "There's something sticky on them. What is the stuff and how much does it cost?"

"I tell you, Alza, it just happens for practically no reason at all. It's a gift that's gonna make us rich."

"You're not very funny. Come on in the house and eat your lunch. It's time to start for work."

Ben let her go without trying to explain further. He shouldn't have tried in the first place. Alza was a good mother to the four children — two boys and two girls — and a truly wonderful cook. But her mind utterly lacked ability to grasp non-material matters.

Perhaps, if he'd started from the beginning, she might have understood a little better. If he'd started with Monday, for instance, when the Power first came over him at work . . .

He remembered it vividly. He'd

been drilling in his usual position on the main spar of the outerwing. The outerwing of the giant passenger plane is an integral fuel tank. They need the extra gasoline to fly the Atlantic and Pacific. As Ben well knew, every rivet and bolt hole in an integral fuel tank must be able to hold gasoline when the wind is screaming by at 400 miles an hour. The holes must be 100 per cent perfect.

That Monday, however, his thoughts dwelt overmuch on the light bill, the gas bill, on the month's payments in general. When the hole he was drilling began to break through the inch-thick dural of the main spar, it dawned on him that he was drilling with a quarter-inch drill. The hole properly demanded an eighth-inch drill.

Quickly, he jerked backward on the drill motor. The drill snapped, frozen in the hole. By the time he'd dug it out, the hole was an awful mess. It was egg-shaped — scrambled-egg-shaped.

**C**OLD sweat ran down Ben's spine. He could foresee what was coming. He knew all too well the chain of events that would follow this disaster.

He was honor bound to call the inspector, who would gloat over the damage as he wrote it up on the back pages of the inspection book. Then the assistant foreman



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would come to see it. He'd change color several times and indulge in a lot of cursing, before chasing off after the foreman.

The foreman would come and wring his hands and then summon the general-foreman. Soon, everyone that was anyone around the plant would be there — engineers and all. They'd mill around and bat the problem back and forth a few times, thoroughly enjoying the excuse to leave their offices. All this at the expense of Ben Finlay.

"The main spar will have to be replaced," Ben told himself. "And it's worth \$2,000, if it's worth a cent." He kept staring at the ragged hole, wishing there was some way to plug it up. Welding was out of the question. The CAA would never allow that, because the flux and acid required would eventually rot the dural.

He could probably find some way to hide it from the inspector. But Ben Finlay couldn't bring himself to do such a thing. To cover up a weakness in an airplane, especially in the wing, was the dirtiest trick an air crafter could pull on the passengers who would fly the oceans in the craft. No, Ben couldn't do that.

If it hadn't been for the monthly payments, trying to buy an old house and feed a wife and four kids on his paycheck, it wouldn't have happened.

He got madder by the second.

"That slimy furniture dealer, that rotten gas company," he kept telling himself and cussing until his head started to buzz. He wished wistfully that, for once, getting angry would do some good. All the time he stared at the damaged hole. If only it wasn't there.

Some errant spirit must have heard his unuttered wish — and paused to grant it. His head buzzed louder and louder. Waves of emotion billowed through his frame. Even his vision was so affected that he couldn't see the damaged hole distinctly any more.

However, he could see clearly, as if it were a breakaway drawing, the surface of the spar where the hole had been. Everything else was in its place. He reached out and touched the spot. It was no longer there — or else Ben Finlay had gone completely out of his mind.

**I**T took him a few minutes to convince himself. The hole really had been there — and now it wasn't. Somehow, somehow, the edges of the hole had run together and made a solid mass of metal again.

He removed the broken drill from his drill motor and replaced it with the one of the proper size. He drilled the hole in the same spot as before. It came out shining and perfect as it was supposed to be.

This phenomenon might have completely upset another person—but not Ben Finlay. He'd always had implicit faith that, some day, success would come his way—that his little place in the universal scheme of things would be revealed. It would merely be his duty at the time to make the most of the opportunity. This, he knew almost instantly, was it.

His thoughts reverted to the garage and the time of day, when he glanced at the old alarm clock on the bench. Alza was calling again. And this time she screamed.

He ate his afternoon snack, unmindful of Alza's continuous jabbering, which consisted mostly of comments about money they didn't have. At 3:45, he grabbed his lunch pail and jumped into his '39 Packard 4-door.

Driving into the aircraft plant parking lot, he had the usual trouble squeezing into a place among the day-shifters' cars. He had to keep thinking of something pleasant. Tuesday he'd gotten mad when he scraped a fender and welded himself to a '53 Buick. It was a lucky thing he'd paid up his five-and-ten insurance on the other guy. The fender of the Buick was rather sad looking after he got through chiseling free.

Ben clocked in, a few minutes before four. As usual, he headed for his position in the outerwing jigs. He wanted to check the kind

of mess in which the day shift would leave the job.

He hadn't gone far when his foreman stopped him. "They want me to bring you upstairs, Ben." The foreman eyed him with more interest than he had ever received before. Ben sensed trouble of some sort and suspected it had to do with the Power.

"Okay," said Ben, feeling a little frightened.

"Don't look so scared," beamed the foreman. "The plant manager wants to see you. And it's good news, boy." He grinned, knowingly. "You fooled us for a few days, but we're not blind, you know."

"You're *not*?" Ben asked vaguely. He tagged along after the foreman through the outerwing section, up a narrow flight of steps, into a private conference room. A dozen or more big wheels sat in one-armed chairs. Behind the desk lounged the biggest wheel of them all, Mr. Sheck, the plant manager.

**T**HEY put Ben in a chair and stuck a cigar in his mouth. Mr. Sheck opened up with a hearty, "Well, Finlay, you can pretty well guess why we've asked you up here. We've learned a good bit about your new method of welding dural and aluminum. Now we're ready to talk business."

It took Ben long, fumbling seconds to find his tongue. He'd chew-

ed actively on the cigar and the tobacco juice made butterflies in his stomach.

"Didn't know anyone knew anything about it," he managed to say at last.

Sheck haw-hawed to his henchmen, who haw-hawed back in unison. "Finlay," he boomed, "we keep a sharp eye on everything that goes on around here. And we're always happy to find you men working on constructive ideas of your own. They pay off sometimes. This one of yours is the best I've ever run into. Welding without a trace — that's colossal, Finlay! And there's no foreign matter left on the material — no flux, no chemical. How in the world do you do it?"

"I intended to keep the whole thing to myself, until I had it all worked out," he said.

"You're a shrewd one," said Sheck. "But that frame-section you welded yesterday had already been tagged by inspection and photographed for the engineers."

"You don't say?" said Ben, feeling foolish.

"Oh, yes," said Sheck, triumphantly. "Of course, our process department is working on an analysis of your method. I expect a full report from them at any moment now. We feel we have the right to analyze your methods. And we're perfectly willing to pay you for your idea. You could save

us a lot of time and position yourself to command greater compensation for your welding methods, by disclosing the entire process now."

Ben let that sink in for a minute and took the cigar from his mouth. "I'd rather not disclose the method. I want more time to work it out completely."

Sheck lost his friendly smile. "Now see here, Finlay. We have engineers, laboratories with thousands of dollars invested in equipment — they're all at your disposal. All we want is the rights to use your discovery to salvage damaged parts. Man, we can save millions of dollars a year!"

But Ben stood his ground. The Power was a gift to him. He wanted to work it out his own way. Besides and more to the point, these practical men wouldn't believe him if he told them the truth.

Two hours later, the conference recessed for coffee and doughnuts in the cafeteria. Then back again, but this time into a higher level conference room. Red leather chairs and paneled walls this time. They just weren't going to let him go without a deal.

**B**Y nine that night, they had gotten around to issuing mild threats. "Legally, we have a right to your discovery and the equipment you use," said Sheck. "It's evident you did a great deal of



your development and testing in the plant and on company time. Probably you've used company equipment and materials."

"I don't believe I have," he answered. "And the salvages I've made were worth much more to the company than anything else I might have been doing."

"You're right, Finlay," said Sheck, who had shed his necktie. "Perhaps I'm just a bull in a china shop. I've used the wrong approach. Let's look at this thing from another point of view."

Then they began talking about Ben and his family. They listened to his troubles. About the bills, and how rough it was to get along on his pay.

"Tell you what we'll do as a compromise," said Sheck. "We'll give you \$500 for an option, say for a week, and \$500 every week thereafter until a contract is signed. You just sign an agreement to sell to us."

Ben agreed. He was glad to bring the conference to an end. They wanted a demonstration, but he refused. The coffee and doughnuts had straightened out his stomach. He was tired, but wanted to get to work just to be doing something.

Down in the shop, Ben felt that they were still plotting against him. "Just ease around," said the foreman. "Help me keep an eye on things."

No work — but there was method to their generosity. They hadn't given up hope of seeing a demonstration tonight.

Soon, Sheck came into the shop. "Now, Ben, we gotta get this plane fixed tonight. It's to be delivered tomorrow morning. The cowlings of the right outboard engine has been put on and taken off so many times the scratches look like cobwebs. We haven't got time to fit another one, even if we had it assembled."

"Okay," said Ben. "I'm tired, but I'll do my best."

Out on the field, he stood under the floodlights at the tip of the right wing. He stared as steadily as he could at the curved surface of the cowling. He forced himself to think, "No money down, easy terms, immediate delivery, payday budget plan."

He guessed that did it. He could see the surface of the cowling grow shiny as the scratches smoothed out.

"Fine!" said Sheck. "Now you trot along home and get some rest."

As he turned to go into the hangar, Ben saw dozens of white collars who had assembled to watch him work. Ben hoped they remembered everything they saw, so that they now knew as much as he did about the Power. He made his way to the clock station, rang out and headed for home.

**N**EXT day, he flashed the check in front of Alza. "This is just the beginning," he said proudly. "We're in the money for good."

Alza was too stunned for comment. But even she had to admit that Ben had something this time. So she dressed the kids and ordered everyone into the '39 Packard. "We're going shopping," she announced.

Ben saw \$200 go like foam on flat beer, at Sears and J. C. Penney's. The back seat of the Packard was really loaded. The kids were screaming and stuffing popcorn into their faces.

"I got an idea," said Ben. "Let's pay off the furniture account at the finance company. Then, just in case something does happen to this deal, we'll have that one off our backs."

"Now you're talking," said Alza, who sweated blood, juggling the income to pay the finance company each month. "We ought to knock off a lot of interest, paying up in full."

"You said it," said Ben. And they were off up the street toward the finance office.

The man behind the grillwork was closing the door of the vault as Ben and his tribe came in. He latched the vault and walked over to Ben, smiling indulgently at the children sliding on the granite floor.

"I want to pay my account in

full," said Ben complacently.

"Very well, sir," the loan man said. "Your name?"

He brought out Ben's account and figured it up. He squinted at the total and said, "Three hundred and twenty-three dollars will pay it in full."

"Better tote that again," said Ben. "I figured it out a month ago. If I'd been able to pay in full then, it would have been less than \$300."

The man checked again. "Sorry, but \$323 is right. One per cent per month, for the time you've had the money."

"That's exactly the way I worked it," said Ben. He prided himself on his handling of figures. "One per cent per month, on the unpaid balance, brings it out to less than \$300."

The loan man smiled. "I see your error. It's one per cent per month on the *original* sales price, which was \$900."

"The original sales price!" Ben fairly shouted. Quickly, he made mental calculations. "You figured it on \$900. But I paid \$100 down. Are you sure the law allows you to charge that way?"

"That's the law," said the loan man disinterestedly.

Ben felt the newly familiar buzzing in his head. "Did you get that, Alza? We're paying interest on our down payment," he said angrily.

"Don't hit him, Ben. We can't

afford the expense," Alza warned him.

Ben beat the counter with his fists and told the loan man exactly what he thought of the money situation, here, there and everywhere. "I oughta get a lawyer and take this to court," he said. The afternoon sun glimmered on the bronze vault behind the loan man. The light hurt Ben's eyes as the buzzing grew stronger and stronger.

**F**INALLY, Ben slapped down enough money for one payment. "You can wait for the balance in regular payments, if and when we got it!" he stated. Then he and Alza gathered up the kids and stormed out, followed by the threats of the loan man to call a cop.

Outside, Ben was still so mad that he welded both doors on the right hand side of the old Packard. Before he went around to the other side, he leaned against the trunk of the car to calm down. They had to get home and he didn't want to climb in the windows, as the kids already were doing from the curb.

Ben was fairly well cooled down by the time the family arrived home. Then he saw the headlines in the afternoon paper—**MILLION DOLLAR DISCOVERY BY AIRCRAFTER.**

At first, Ben was furious. Then he guessed it hadn't been intentional on the part of the plant of-

ficials. He could tell this from the story beneath the headline. An enterprising reporter had put two and two together, after running down a few rumors.

But, with the story in the papers, Ben decided that the plant was no place for him tonight. He called them up, concluding with, "And tell Mr. Sheck I'm working on that deal here at home tonight."

After supper, he headed for the garage, but before he got out of the house, there came a banging on the front door.

"Cops are coming!" yelled the kids.

Sure enough. There were four cops in uniform along with the loan man from the finance company and several other official-looking individuals in plain clothes.

Ben let them into the front room. "Ben Finlay," said the officer whose badge shone like gold. "Seems like you did something to the vault in the finance office this afternoon. It's welded solid."

"We don't know how you did it," the loan man butted in, "but the insurance company says it'll cost \$5,000 to cut it open and \$20,000 to replace it. You'd better do something right now."

At this point, Ben thought a little misdirection of the truth would serve a good purpose. "I had nothing to do with your old money-trap. How could I?"

The loan man held up an after-

noon paper, shaking it in Ben's face. "What's this about a new method of welding you've discovered?"

**B**EN saw they had him, cold turkey. "Okay, fellows," he said, thinking fast. "I confess. I'll get my tools from the garage and be right with you."

The cops milled out the front door and to the side of the house. Ben went to the garage, but to the back instead of the front. He vaulted the fence into a neighbor's yard, crossed it and went out the gate into the alley. Soon he was three blocks away on the boulevard.

Micky's beer joint was on the corner. A few minutes later, Ben was blowing the suds off a second one.

Two distinguished-looking characters entered. Anyone could tell at a glance that they weren't here to drink beer. One looked perhaps a year or two short of a hundred and the other, middle-aged, wore a bow-tie. "We're looking for Gilmore Street," the young one told the bartender. They gave the street number, to be exact. It was Ben's.

He butted in. "And who would you want to see at that address?"

"A Mr. Ben Finlay," said the oldest.

"I am a Mr. Ben Finlay," he said, beginning to feel warm in-

side from the second beer.

"Really? Indeed! Well, as a matter of fact—that is . . . This is rather an informal place, Mr. Finlay, but we're from the University."

They finally spluttered out an introduction of themselves. Between the two of them, Ben gathered, they were scientists from UCLA and were deeply interested in psychic phenomena.

Ben took the gentlemen to a booth. He was in a mood to take the center of the stage, now that he was working on his third beer. The intelligent-looking characters drank buttermilk.

Ben came right out with it, making a clean breast of the whole business right then and there. If they had suspected, from details in the newspaper, that something phenomenal was taking place, Ben Finlay meant to inform them that they were right.

He'd expected their eyes to pop, that perhaps they'd call him a nut. In this, he was disappointed.

"Really not a rare case," said old bones. "We found a man once, who caused the ink to disappear from papers after they were signed. This, we finally discovered, came from his failure in business some years before, where he'd signed contracts that broke him."

"No kiddin'?" said Ben.

"And there was another chap who could cause the water to

separate from any material. We traced this to an experience of being lost in Death Valley for three days without water."

"Do you think all these things are alike?" asked Ben. "I mean, the same kinda Power?"

"We do," said the scientist. "It is parapsychologically implausible otherwise."

"Ah!" said Ben. "And have you ever found a way to reverse this Power?"

"No," said the other scientist, shaking his head sadly. "Not yet."

Ben's features drooped. "In that case, I'll take another beer."

**T**HE scientists made a lot of notes and had Ben promise to visit the University one day next week for further study of his problem. They bought Ben his sixth beer, declining more buttermilk before taking their leave.

Ben drank a seventh and an eighth, while relating everything that had transpired to a group at the bar.

"But they can't help me a bit," said Ben, mournfully. "They've never heard of the Power being reversed, and these babies oughta know."

Sympathy grew for Ben around the bar stools. One fellow bought a round of liquor. Since it was already poured, Ben threw it down the hatch. By the time he remembered he was a beer drinker, he

was favoring one eye more than the other.

He decided to go home and settle with the cops and the loan man. If they were still there, someone was going to get walloped.

When he got off the bar stool, he could hardly have found the floor but for assistance from the phenomenon of gravity. He was making his way toward the door on his hands and knees when the cops entered.

Two of them got him to his feet. He swung one big haymaker at them all and passed out.

About nine the next morning, Ben groaned his way awake on a hard bunk in the city jail. As he tried to get up, he struck his head a resounding blow on the upper bunk. He was alone in the cell. The jailer, looking puzzled, was studying him through the bars.

As his mind cleared, his actions were anything but original. "You can't put me in here," he yelled, grasping the bars of the cell door. "Let me out, do you hear?" Behind the jailer were several other people, some in uniform, some in plain clothes.

"We've been trying all night to open this cell after you did something to it last night," said the jailer.

**B**EN inspected the cell door. It was as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. "I must have been kinda

mad," he said, trying to remember what had happened.

"You were supposed to be in court this morning," said the jailer. "But, things being as they are, the court has come down here instead."

They had put a table and some chairs outside the cell. The judge hit the table with a mallet. He charged Ben with being drunk and resisting arrest. Ben pleaded guilty and got ten days or ten dollars.

"Call my wife, Alza," said Ben. "She'll give you the ten dollars."

"We called her this morning," said the jailer. "She said, 'Good, keep him there.'"

Ben knew his Alza. She had what was left of the \$500. She'd probably go shopping again today.

"I'll have to see my wife to get the money," he said. "You'll have to cut the cell open."

"Not on your life!" said the judge. "I can't destroy taxpayers' property that way. If you want out, you'll have to open the cell the same way you sealed it." The judge rapped with the mallet again. "Next case."

The next case was a civil suit by the finance company. The judge instructed the defendant that the best way out of that one was to open the vault, of course, after he had opened the cell door.

Suddenly, Ben saw a ray of hope. The aircraft plant would be behind him one hundred per cent. "Call my plant," said Ben. "Mr.

Sheck will straighten things out for me."

"I believe the gentleman you refer to is present," said the judge.

"We feel we have need of Mr. Finlay," said Sheck. "But from present developments, if Mr. Finlay can't get himself out of the cell, he is useless to us." He faced Ben, his neck reddening with anger. "You see, Finlay, that cowling you smoothed out the night before last wasn't the only thing that got welded. The motor is fused solid. That's \$125,000 gone pouf. Unless, of course, you can do something about it."

Ben was thinking hard. He told them about the scientists he'd met in the bar. "Call them at UCLA. Maybe they can help me."

"They've already been interviewed," said the judge. "They've never heard of the Power being reversed. Theoretically, they say it's impossible."

SO, that was that. Ben saw the last ray of hope vanish. They were all against him. He was being tortured like a trapped animal. They couldn't understand, and people fear things they don't understand. Besides, they were all interested in the same thing—money. The finance company wanted \$25,000. The plant wanted \$125,000. And the judge wanted \$10 or ten days. Well, Ben Finlay had no intention of spending those

ten days in jail.

Even if he got out and survived the civil suits, he'd be forever getting mad and causing trouble. No one would give him a job. And the devil himself wouldn't be able to live with Alza after the balance of the \$500 was gone. There was absolutely no way out of this mess, except one. Ben Finlay would take that way, before their very eyes.

He removed the belt from around his waist and climbed up on the top bunk of the cell. He looped the belt around one of the overhead cell bars and buckled it. He then took a string from one of his shoes. He tied the belt with the shoe string, so the loop was about the right size for his head.

"Stop him!" cried the judge. "He's going to hang himself."

"Get a cutting torch!" bellowed the jailer. "Ain't nobody allowed to commit suicide in my jail."

Ben stuck his foot through the loop, to test it. He used the foot that had the shoe without a string. He found the loop sturdy as he bore down on it with his ankle. But his shoe fell off.

Instinctively, he reached to catch the falling shoe. He stumbled. His hips left the bunk and he found himself hanging head down, dangling by one shoeless foot.

The jailer was gripping the bars of the cell door, shaking them as his customers had done for years.

Ben dangled and began swearing lustily.

The jailer fell backward as the cell door suddenly swung open. That was it—the Power had been reversed! All Ben had to do to reverse it was to reverse himself.

**B**EN got a kick out of standing on his head in the finance office. Newspaper photographers took pictures, and everything. But the loan man had to stand on his head, too, so Ben could see a little of him, in order to get mad enough for the vault to open.

By the time the growing group of spectators reached the aircraft plant, Ben was having such a good time, he couldn't get angry.

But Mr. Sheck knew aircrafters. He had Ben's tool box brought out and opened. As Ben stood on his head in front of the huge airliner, Sheck kicked over the tool box, spilling tools over the runway. That did it.

Ben doesn't work in the plant any more, except to make major repairs in an emergency. He spends most of his days at UCLA with the scientists, trying to figure out where the Power comes from. But, with all the pretty coeds around, Ben seldom gets mad enough to give much of a demonstration.

