Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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Printed in the U. S. A. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

Pillar to Post

by

JOHN WYNDHAM

Illustrated by POWERS

Naturally the amputee wanted to stay out of his body for good . . . but you can't blame the man of the future for wanting to escape it!

Forcett Mental Clinic
Delano, Conn.
28th Feb.

Messrs. Thompson & Handett
Attorneys-at-Law
512 Gable Street
Philadelphia, Pa.

Gentlemen:

In response to your request, we have conducted a thorough examination of our patient, Stephen Dallboy, and have established his identity beyond legal question. Attested documents in support of this are enclosed, and dispose entirely of his claim to the Terence Molton property.

At the same time, we admit we are bewildered. The condition of the patient has altered quite radically since our last examination, when he was indubitably feebleminded. Indeed, but for this obsession that he is Terence Molton, which he maintains with complete consistency, we should

now classify him as normal. In view of the obsession and the remarkable assertions with which he supports it, we feel that he should remain here under observation, which may give us the opportunity of dispelling the whole fantasy system—and at the same time of clearing up several points we find puzzling.

In order that you may more clearly understand the situation, we are enclosing a copy of a statement written by the patient, which we suggest you study before reading our concluding remarks.

STATEMENT BY TERENCE MOLTON

I KNOW this is difficult to believe. In fact, when the thing first happened, I didn't believe it myself. I figured it was just a stage, maybe, in the deteriorating process. I've had enough dope long enough to play hell with my nervous system—yet the funny thing was how real it seemed right away. Still, I thought, everything would seem real to De Quincey when he was coked up, and to Coleridge, too.

> A damsel with a dulcimer
> In a vision once I saw . . .

Vision is a poor word — all quality and no quantity. How strong was that vision? Could he put out his hand and touch the babe? He heard her sing, but did she speak to him? And did he find himself a new man, free from pain? I guess even the milk and honey of Paradise are relative. Some would yearn for a kind of celestial Hollywood, but just having no pain and being complete would have been Paradise enow for me.

It had been just over four years since that mine had got me—four years, nine operations and more to come. Interesting for the doctors, no doubt, but it had turned me into just a hulk in a wheelchair, with only half of one leg and no feet at all under the blanket.

"Go easy on the dope," the surgeon had warned me.

"What'll happen if I don't?" I asked.

"You don't want to become an addict, do you?"

That was funny. If they'd given me anything else to stop the pain, I wouldn't have wanted to risk addiction. But they didn't have anything else. And if they had refused me dope, I'd have killed myself. They knew that. So the nurses gave it to me, though always trying to talk me into cutting down.

And there was Sally. She used to come to the hospital every visiting day, bringing me candy or books and cigarettes, and lean-

ing over the bed to kiss me, with that gentle little smile that needs only a word to turn it into hopeless weeping.

I finally said, "Look, Sally, this isn't doing you or me any good. The sample I showed you was a healthy young guy. What you'd get now isn't anything like the sample. Why don't you go find somebody who is?"

Poor kid, it nearly broke her up. She argued out of mistaken loyalty, but I didn't want her on my conscience. They tell me her husband's a good joe and the baby is cute. Some of the nurses and Gray Ladies thought I was brooding about it. The fact is this is how I figure it should be.

All the same, when every woman you see is kind to you—in about the same way she would be to a sick dog—

Oh, well, there was always the dope.

And then, when I wasn't expecting anything at all except more pain and misery, there was this . . . this *vision.*

THE day had been a rotten one for me. My right leg and my left foot were hurting a lot. But most of the right leg had been taken off and the left foot had had to go, too, a little later, so nothing could be done about it except to reach for the bottle.

Maybe I took a little more than usual, but for all the difference it made to anyone else, I might as well be doped to the eyes all the time.

I lay back, feeling the pain fade out. I seemed to float smoothly and gently up and away, disembodied, filled with a surging lightness. The pain must have made me pretty tired, I guess, because I could feel myself falling asleep before I'd even begun to enjoy the lack of it . . .

When I opened my eyes, there, in front of me, was the vision of the damsel. She didn't have a dulcimer, and she certainly did not look Abyssinian, but she was singing, very quietly. It was an odd song, and for all I knew it might have been about Mount Abora, because I couldn't understand a word of it.

We were in a room—well, yes, it was a room, though it was more like being inside a bubble. It was all cool green, with a soft opalescence, and the walls curving up so you couldn't tell where they became ceiling. There were two arched openings in the sides. Through them were tree tops and a patch of blue sky. Close to one of them, the girl was fiddling with something I couldn't see.

She glanced toward me, and saw that my eyes were open. She turned and said something that sounded like a question, but it meant absolutely nothing to me.

I just looked back at her.

She was worth looking at. A tall, beautifully proportioned figure, with brown hair caught back by a ribbon. The material of her dress was diaphanous, yet there was a vast amount of it, arranged in multitudes of cunning folds. It made me think of the pre-Raphaelites' versions of the classical. It must have been cobweb-light, for as she moved it swirled and hesitated in mid-air. The result was like that frozen high-wind effect so popular in late Greek sculpture.

When I did not reply, she frowned a little and repeated her question. I did not pay a lot of attention to the words. As a matter of fact, I was thinking: "Well, that's that; I've had it," and deciding that I was now in some kind of anteroom to Heaven, or—well, anyway, an anteroom. I wasn't scared, not even greatly surprised. I remember feeling, "That's a nasty experience finished with," and wondering a little that the prelude to eternity should resemble certain Victorian schools of painting.

When I still did not answer, her dark eyes widened a little. There was a look of wonder in them, perhaps a slight tinge of alarm, as she came toward me. Slowly she said:

"You—are—not—Hymorell?"

Her English had a strange accent, and anyway I did not know what hymorell meant. I might be, or I might not. She went on:

"Not—Hymorell? Some—other—person?"

It sounded as if Hymorell was a name.

"I'm Terry," I told her. "Terry Molton."

There was a block of the green stuff near me. It looked hard and cold, but she sat down on it and stared at me, her expression half-disbelief mixed with surprise.

By this time I was beginning to discover myself. I was lying on a remarkably soft couch with some kind of blanket over me that smoothed itself out when I turned, instead of getting bunched under me. I don't know how they got it to do that. It moved all the way down what should have been my right leg — including what would have been my right foot, if I'd had one.

I sat up suddenly, feeling my legs, both of them. There wasn't any pain. But there were two legs and two feet!

Then I did something I hadn't let myself do in years—I burst into tears.

SHE began speaking to me in uncertain, foreign English, and I remember wondering how there could be a language problem at the gates of Paradise. But I was more concerned with myself. I

threw back the blanket and sat staring at the legs.

"They're not mine," I said dazedly, and then looked at the hand with which I felt them. "That's not mine, either."

"Of—course," she said hesitantly. "How could—they be?"

"I can wriggle the toes and bend the fingers, so what's the difference? You can't expect any sense in a dream."

I don't recall what we talked about then. I suppose I was too excited and bewildered to take it all in. I do know she told me her name—Clytassamine—and I remember thinking it was a real mouthful. But what seemed more important was to swing the legs over the side and stand on them.

For the first time since that mine got me, I *stood!*

There's no sense going into a lot of detail. What I might say would be about as informative as a Trobrian Islander's first impression of New York. I just had to take most things on trust, the way he would.

"You need—the word is—garments, is it not?" she asked.

I certainly did. Staying in a hospital for four years, you get to think of women as nurses, so I hadn't been aware of it. She didn't seem concerned and that helped me not to be. She stood me in a little cubicle that must have taken my measurements somehow, because clothes came out of a slot in the wall. There was a whale of a lot of it, and not a seam to be seen. Pretty filmy and ridiculous, it seemed to me, but it satisfied her, so I let her help me put it on. When I was dressed, she opened the door.

"You mean I have to go out in this damned nightgown?" I demanded.

"We all—dress—this way," she said. "In other garments—people—notify."

It stopped me for a moment. "Notice?" I asked.

"Notice," she corrected herself without self-consciousness. "Come."

We emerged into a great hall built of the same green composition. I figured that if Manhattan were to sink into the Hudson River, Grand Central Station under water would look about the way this place did.

A number of people were around, none of them hurrying. All their clothes were of the filmy stuff, but as far as color and design went, it was apparently each to his own taste. There was a deadening of sound that I found oppressive, perhaps because you'd normally expect an echo in a huge place like this, whereas our slippers were silent on the floor and the quiet voices made only a soft hum.

Clytassamine led the way to a

row of double seats set against the wall and pointed to an end seat. I sat down experimentally in it, and she sat confidently beside me.

The seat rose about four inches from the floor and began to drift across the room.

"Are you sure this is all right?" I asked, worried.

"This is — conveyance. You — traveled?—went?—only by foot and by—animal?"

I looked at her in astonishment. "Are you kidding? I've been in cars, planes, tanks, ships, trains."

Did she think I came from a farm?

IN the middle of the great room, we turned and slid silently toward an arch at the far end, and out into the open air. We rose until we had an elevation of a yard or so above the ground, while, from the shallow platform to which the seat was attached, a curved windshield came up to cover us.

We accelerated to twenty-five miles an hour, I'd say, and swept smoothly across parklike country, traveling a course between occasional trees and clumps of bushes. I suppose she was navigating the contraption in some way, but I couldn't see how. In every way except speed, it was a better way to travel than anything else I've known—more in the magic carpet class.

It was a strange journey; something over an hour, I imagine, and in all that time we never crossed nor even saw a road, though twice I noticed paths that didn't seem to be used much.

"No cultivated fields or gardens?" I asked.

She looked blank. I tried to explain in terms of food, but that didn't clear anything up. She seemed completely unfamiliar with the *idea* of vegetables or grains, which increased my feeling that I was in a spirit world where we were supposed to live on ambrosia. There were deerlike creatures that paid us no attention. I was afraid to ask if they were raised as meat animals.

The only signs of humanity were occasional large buildings to be seen above the trees, but they weren't on our course. The trees were, though. Every time we came to a section of woods, I tried to pull back on a nonexistent stick and hop over it, but apparently the contraption didn't work that way, for we always went around and not over obstacles.

"Are you just showing me the sights, or are we heading anywhere in particular?" I wanted to know.

Both concepts gave her trouble. "All—things are sights," she said, after I'd done my best to explain. "If nowhere to go, stay—

home. With you it is—otherwise?"

She should have seen weekend traffic. I didn't describe it because by that time I began to catch glimpses of a building on a hill ahead of us.

I'm no architect and I can't say this part showed this kind of influence and that part something else. It wouldn't have made much difference if I could have, though, because every building I had ever seen had been based on some geometrical pattern. This looked more as if it had *grown*. Bushes came close up against it, and a lot were even sprouting on top. The only reason I was sure it was a building was that it couldn't be anything natural.

As we got nearer, I became still more bewildered. I could see now that what I had thought to be small bushes were full-grown trees—even those on top of it. The place was unbelievably immense. Then, in the midst of my amazement, I remembered myself, and smiled. The dope dream was running true to form:

> It was a miracle of rare device,
> A sunny pleasure dome with
> caves of ice.

But when we arrived, it wasn't at all like that. It rose before us like a cleverly designed artificial mountain. We swept into it through an entrance sixty yards wide and several hundred feet high, to emerge into a central hall of staggering size.

There was no suggestion whatever of "pleasure dome," though something of the "caves of ice" feeling came from the translucency of the pearly walls.

MORE slowly, and seeming to drift like a feather in an air current, we floated across the place. There were a few men and women walking in a leisurely fashion, and a few chairs gliding as our own did.

"A kind of railroad terminal?" I asked.

She didn't get it, nor did airfield, bus station or waiting room mean anything to her. I gave up and watched us go through the enormous hall and through a dozen or more passages and lesser halls, wondering how she could find her way. But I wasn't too surprised—it always puzzles me how people can get around in cities I don't know, especially where the streets have names instead of numbers.

We came to a relatively small hall, where a dozen or so men and women were gathered, apparently waiting for us. There the chair stopped. It lowered the few inches to the floor and we got out, whereupon, in a way that could happen only in a dream, it lifted just clear and drifted away to the

wall, as if parking itself.

Clytassamine spoke to the group of people and indicated me. They nodded gravely in my direction. It seemed the polite thing to do, so I nodded back. Then, with her as interpreter, a kind of catechism began.

I think it was during that questioning that I really began to feel there was something seriously wrong with my dream. They wanted to know my name, where I came from, what I did, what had happened to my legs and why, what war and hospital meant, and a great deal more, and the answers I gave made them frown baffledly and pause now and then to confer.

It was all very logical and detailed, which was wrong. Dreams —my dreams, at any rate—have a more cinematic quality. They do not proceed in smooth sequence, but jump suddenly from one scene to another, as though directed by an erratic and impatient psychotic. But this was not at all like that. I was acutely aware of what was going on, both physically and mentally.

At last Clytassamine said, "They wish you — learn — language. More easy to—speak."

"That's going to take a long while," I said, because not a single word that any of them had spoken had been familiar to me.

"No. Few thlana."

"How much?"

"Quarter day," she explained.

"A lousy linguist like me? I wasn't even able to learn pig-Latin!"

She didn't answer or argue. She gave me some food—a box of things that looked like candy and tasted good. They weren't sweet or very big, but only a few took care of my hunger.

"Now — sleep," said Clytassamine, pointing to a cold, unfriendly-looking block of the green stuff.

I got on it and found that it was neither chilly nor hard. I lay there worriedly, wondering if this was the end of the dream and I would wake up to find myself back in my own bed, with the old pain where my legs ought to be. But I didn't wonder long. There must have been some drug in the food.

WHEN I awoke, I was still there. Hanging over me was a kind of canopy of rose-colored metal which had not been there before. It was—I'm going to give up trying to describe things; there was too much basic unfamiliarity. What would an ancient Egyptian know of a telephone by looking at it? What would a Roman or a Greek make of a jet plane or a radio. And as for TV—!

Coming right down to the simple things, if you saw a slab of

chocolate for the first time, you might think it was for mending shoes, lighting the fire, or building houses. About the last use you'd guess for it would be eating—and, when you did find out, you'd most likely try eating soap because the texture was similar and the color more attractive.

That's the way it was with me. You grow up with your conditioning complete. You look at a machine and you don't have to say to yourself, "Ah, that works by steam, or gasoline, or electricity," because you know, and you generally have a good idea of what the machine does without having to think about it.

But nearly all of what I was seeing now was foreign to me. I had no place to start. Not understanding what might cut or burn me if I touched it, I was scared of everything—just like a child or an aborigine. Naturally, I floundered around with wild guesses, but mostly they had to remain just that.

I guessed now that the canopy was part of a hypnotic teaching machine, something like those the Navy tried to use to teach Morse Code. I guessed that, however, because I found I could now understand what the people were saying—some of it, at least—but the concepts behind the language were totally alien. I knew only what I could translate directly.

The word "thlana" that Clytassamine had used, for example, I now knew was a measure of time—one hour and twelve minutes, making twenty thlana to the day—so I'd been out about five thlana, almost six hours. "Dool" was electricity, but "laythal" meant nothing to me. I knew it was some form of power and that was all, not where it came from or what it did, though Clytassamine did her best to explain:

"The mizmo is changed into frengra, and that produces laythal. But it has to be senaced, of course, before it can be baxtoa."

It wasn't her fault. You try, explaining how coal and water are converted into electricity without using terms that are unfamiliar to an illiterate, and laythal, as I understood it, was even more complicated. But these difficulties had the effect of enhancing the dreamlike quality. The utter blankness of certain words or ideas which kept cropping up, like the dead keys of an old piano, began to get me down.

"ENOUGH, Clytassamine," a man said, when my distress must have begun to show pretty plainly. "Take him away and look after him."

The relief was almost physical as I sat down beside her again on one of the flying seats. I sighed and relaxed finally as it floated

us back once more into the open air.

EVEN before I understood anything about this unfamiliar world, I was somewhat awed by Clytassamine's power of mental adjustment. It seemed to me that it must be a frightening experience, discovering that a person you have known for a long while has without warning become a perfect stranger — with, maybe, unpredictable reactions. Yet she showed no alarm, and only occasionally made the slip of calling me Hymorell.

I realized why somebody recovering consciousness usually demands first of all, "Where am I?" I wanted to know that very much; without that information, I didn't seem to be able to get my thinking started properly. There was no fixed point to begin from.

When we were back in the green room again, I began to ask questions. She looked at me doubtfully.

"You should rest. Simply relax and don't worry. We will look after you. If I were to try to explain, I would bewilder you more."

"You couldn't," I told her. "Nothing could. I've got to the stage where I can't pretend this is a dream any longer. I've got to get some kind of orientation or go crazy."

She looked at me closely again, and then nodded. "Very well. But where am I to begin? What is most urgent?"

"I want to know where I am, who I am, and how it happened."

"As to who you are, you know that. You told me you are Terry Molton."

"But this—" I slapped my left thigh—"this isn't Terry Molton."

"Temporarily it is," she said. "It was Hymorell's body, but now all the qualities that make it individual—mentality, personality, character — are yours. Therefore, it is Terry Molton's body."

"And what happened to Hymorell?"

"He has transferred to what was your body."

"Then he's made a damn bad deal," I told her. I thought for a moment. "That doesn't make sense. I'm not the same as I was before I was shot up. Physical differences make mental differences. Injuries and dope changed mine to some extent—if they'd done it more, I'd have a completely different personality."

"Who told you that?"

"Common sense."

"And your scientists postulate no constant? Surely there must be some constant factor not affected by changes. And if there is that factor, may it not be a cause rather than an effect?"

"As I understand it, it's simply a matter of balance—physical and psychological forces held in equilibrium."

"Then you *don't* understand it," she told me.

I decided to drop that angle for the moment.

"What is this place?" I asked.

"The building is called Cathalu."

"No, I mean where is it? Is it on Earth? It looks like Earth, but nowhere that I ever heard of."

"Of course it's Earth. Where else would it be? But it's in a different salany."

I WAS up against another of those blank words once more. Salany meant absolutely nothing to me.

"Do you mean it's in a different—?" I began, and then stopped, baffled. There didn't seem to be a word in her language for "time," at least in the sense I meant.

"I told you it would be bewildering," she said. "You think differently. In terms of old thinking—as near as I can understand it—you come from one end of the human race. Now you are at the other."

"But I don't," I protested. "There were some twenty million years of human evolution before me."

"Oh, that!" she said, airily dismissing those twenty million years with a wave of her hand.

"Well, at least," I went on desperately, "you can tell me how I got here."

"Roughly, yes. It is an experiment of Hymorell's. He has been trying for a long time—" in this straightforward sense, I noticed, there *did* seem to be a word for time—"but now he has made a new approach. A successful one at last. Several times before, he has almost done it, but the transfer did not hold. His most successful attempts were about three generations ago. He—"

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

She looked up questioningly. "Yes?"

"I thought you said he tried three generations ago."

"I did."

I got up from the block I'd been sitting on and looked out of the arched windows. It was a peaceful, sunny, normal-looking day out there.

"Maybe you were right—I'd better rest," I said.

"That's sensible," she agreed. "Don't bother your head about the hows and whys. After all, you won't be here long."

"You mean, I'll be going back—to be as I was?"

She nodded.

I could feel my body under the unfamiliar robe. It was a good

body, strong, well-kept, lithe, whole, and there was no pain in it.

"No," I said. "I don't know where I am, or what I am now, but one thing I do know—I'm not going back to that hell."

She looked at me and shook her head pityingly.

THE next day, after we had fed on more of the candies that were not candies, and drunk an elusive-flavored milky stuff, she led the way into the hall and toward the chairs.

I stopped. "Can't we walk? It's a long time since I was able to."

"Why, yes, of course," she said, and we turned toward the doorway. Several people spoke to her, and one or two of them to me. There was curiosity in their eyes, but their manners were kindly, as though to set a stranger at ease. It was evident that they knew I was not Hymorell, yet they were too polite to mention it.

Outside, we walked across rough grass and found a path leading through a thicket. It was quiet, peaceful, Arcadianly beautiful. To me, feeling the ground beneath my feet as something precious, everything had the freshness of Spring. The blood livened in my veins in a way that I had forgotten.

"Wherever it is, it's lovely," I said, glancing around.

We walked on in silence for a while, until my curiosity came back.

"What did you mean by 'the other end of the human race?'" I asked her.

"Just that. We think we are coming to the end, finishing. We are practically sure of it, though there is always chance."

"I have never seen anyone more healthy or more beautiful," I said, looking straight at her.

She smiled. "It is a nice body. My best, I think."

For the moment, I ignored that baffling addition. "Then what is happening? Is it infertility?"

"No. There are not a great many children, but that is more a result than a cause. It is that something in us is failing to reproduce—the thing that makes us human instead of merely animal. We call it malukos."

The word translated as something like a spirit or a soul, yet not quite either.

"Then the children—?"

"Nearly all of them lack that. They are — feebleminded. If things go on this way, they will all be like that one day, and then it will be over."

I pondered that, feeling that I was back in the dream again.

"I don't know," she went on. "One doesn't think of the salany arithmetically, though there is

the perimetrical approach."

I couldn't make sense of that. "Aren't there any records?"

"Oh, yes. That is how Hymorell and I learned your language. But there are very big gaps. Five times, at least, the race all but destroyed itself. There are thousands of years missing from the records at different periods."

"And how long is it going to be before it is all finished?" I asked.

"We don't know that, either. Our task is to prolong it because there is always chance. It *may* happen that the intelligence factors will become strong again."

"How do you mean, 'prolong it?' Prolong your own lives?"

"We transfer. When a body begins to fail, or when it is about fifty years old and getting past its best, we choose one of the feebleminded and transfer to that. This," she added, holding up her perfect hand and studying it, "is my fourteenth body. It's a very nice one."

I agreed. "But do you mean you can go on and on transferring?"

"As long as there are bodies to transfer to."

"But—but that's immortality."

"No," she said, scornfully, "nothing like it. It is just prolongation. Someday, sooner or later, there'll be an accident. That's mathematically inevitable. It might have been a hundred years ago, or it might be tomorrow—"

"Or a thousand years hence?" I suggested.

"Exactly, but one day it will come."

I did not for a moment doubt that she was telling me the truth, for by this time I was prepared for any fantastic situation. All the same, I revolted against it. I had an instinctive sense of disapproval—prejudice, of course, the same prejudice which made me disapprove of the soft, flowing garments and the soft, easy manner of life. I couldn't help feeling that the process she spoke of was allied to cannibalism in some symbolic fashion.

SHE must have read my expression, for she said, explaining, not excusing: "This body wasn't any good to the girl who had it. I don't suppose she was really even conscious of it. It was being wasted. I shall look after it. I shall have children. Some of them may be normal human children. When they grow old, they will be able to transfer. The urge to survival still exists, you see. Something may happen; someone may make a discovery to save us even now."

"And the girl who had this body? What happened to her?"

"Well, she had very little be-

yond a few instincts. What there was changed places with me."

"Into a body aged *fifty?* Losing thirty years of life?"

"Can you call it loss when she was incapable of using it?"

I did not reply to that, for a thought had struck me. "So that's what Hymorell was working on! He was trying to transfer normal personalities from the past into feebleminded bodies! That's it, isn't it?"

She looked at me steadily. "He's been successful at last. It is a real transference this time."

I was strangely unsurprised. I suppose I had been working up to the realization before it actually came. But there was a lot I wanted to know about the why and how as I was affected. I asked her for more details.

"Hymorell wanted to get as far as possible," she told me. "The limit was the point where he could be sure of assembling the parts to make an instrument that would get him back here. If he went too far in history, certain essential metals would not be known, instruments would be inaccurate, electric power unavailable. In that case, it might take him years to build the instrument, if he could do it at all. The use of nuclear fission was the line he decided to draw. Further away than that, he thought, might be dangerous.

"Then he had to find a contact. It had to be a subject where the integration was not good—where there was a lesion weakening the attachment of the personality to the physical shape. When we perform the operation, we can prepare the subject, which is easy. But he had to find one already in a suitable state. Unfortunately, those he could find were nearly all on the point of death, but he found you at last and then he had to study the strength of your tie to life. He was puzzled because it fluctuated a great deal."

"That would be the dope," I suggested.

"Possibly. Anyway, he worked out a *rhythmic* incidence of lesion, and then tried. This is the result."

"I see," I said. "How long did he figure it would take him to build the instrument for his return?"

"He couldn't tell that. It depends on his facilities for assembling materials."

"Then it's going to take him quite a while, I'd say. A legless cripple wasn't a convenient subject to choose, from that point of view."

"But he'll do it."

"Not if I can help it," I told her.

She shook her head. "Once you have transferred, you never can have the perfect integration you

had with your own body. If at no other time, he will put on more power and get at you when you're sleeping."

"We'll see about that," I said.

Afterward, I saw the instrument that Hymorell had used for the transfer. It was not large. In appearance, it was little more than a liquid-filled lens mounted upon a box the size of a portable typewriter, from which protruded two polished metal handles. But within the box there was enough intricacy of wiring, tubes, and strange gadgets to fill me with great satisfaction. No one, I said to myself, was going to knock a thing like that together in a few days, or even a few weeks.

THE days drifted the life by with them. That placidity which was their chief character-

istic was, at first, restful. After that came periods when I wanted to go wild and break up something just for the diversion.

Clytassamine took me here and there in the great green building. There were concerts at which I understood not a thing. I sat there, bored and musing to myself while around me the audience went into an intellectual trance, finding something in the strange scales and queerer harmonies that was utterly beyond my perception.

And there was one hall where colors played on a large fluorescent screen. They seemed to be projected from the spectators themselves in some incomprehensible way. Everybody but me enjoyed it. You could feel that. And now and then, for no reason that I could perceive, they would all sigh or laugh together. Nevertheless, I thought some of the effects very pretty, and said so. By the way it was received, it was the wrong thing to say.

Only in the performances of three-dimensionally projected plays was I occasionally able to follow the action for a while—and when I thought I could, it usually shook me badly.

Clytassamine became impatient with my comments. "How can you expect to feel when you measure civilized behavior by primitive taboos?" she asked.

She took me to a museum. It was not like any I had thought of, being mostly a collection of instruments projecting sound or images, or both, according to selection. I saw some horrible things. We went back, back, and still further back in time. I wanted to see or hear something of my own time.

"There's only sound," she said.

"All right," I told her. "Let's have music."

She worked at the keyboard of the machine. Into that great hall, a familiar sound stole softly and mournfully. As I listened to it, I had a sense of emptiness and vast desolation. Memories flooded back as if the old world—not, oddly enough, the one I had left, but that in which I was a child—were suddenly around me. A wave of sentimentality, of overwhelming self-pity and nostalgia for all the hopes and joys and childhood that had vanished utterly engulfed me, and the tears streamed down my face.

I did not go to that museum again. And the music which conjured a whole world up from the aged dust? No, it was not a Beethoven symphony, nor a Mozart concerto.

It was *The Old Folks At Home.*

"DO you never work? Does nobody work?" I asked Clytassamine.

"Oh, yes, if we want to."

"But what about the unpleasant things—the things that must be done?"

"What things?" she asked, puzzled.

"Well, growing food, providing power, making clothes, building, transportation . . ."

She looked surprised.

"Why, naturally, the machines do all that. You wouldn't expect men to do those things."

"But who looks after the machines and keeps them in order?"

"Themselves, of course. A mechanism that couldn't maintain itself wouldn't be a machine. It would be just a form of tool."

"Oh," I said. And I supposed it would, though the thought was new to me.

"Do you mean to say," I went on, "that for your fourteen generations — some four hundred years or so—you've done nothing but this?"

"Well, I've had quite a lot of babies. Three of them were quite normal. And I've worked on eugenic research from time to time. Almost everybody does when he thinks he's got a lead."

"But how can you stand it, just going on and on?"

"It is not easy sometimes and some of us do give up, but that is a crime, because there is always chance. And it's not quite so monotonous as you think. Each transfer makes a difference. You feel as if the world had become a different place then. Even in one body, tastes can change quite a lot in one lifetime, and they inevitably differ between bodies. But you are the same person, yet you are young again. You're hopeful, the world looks brighter, you think you'll be wiser this time. And then you fall in love again, just as sweetly and foolishly as before. It's wonderful, like a rebirth. You can know just how wonderful only if you have been fifty and then become twenty."

"I can guess," I said. "I was worse than just being fifty before this happened. But love? For four years, I haven't dared to think of love . . ."

"You dare now," she said. "Can't you?"

I could. I did.

THERE was so much I wanted to know. "What happened to *my* world?" I asked her later. "It seemed pretty well headed for disaster, as I saw it. I suppose it nearly wiped itself out in some

vast and destructive global war?"

"It just died, the same as all the early civilizations. Nothing spectacular."

I thought of my world, its intricacies and complexities, the mastery of distance and speed, the progress of science.

"Just died?" I repeated. "It can't have. There must have been something that broke it up."

"Oh, no. The passion for order is a manifestation of the deep desire for security. The desire is natural, but the attainment is fatal. There was the means to produce a static world, which was achieved. When the need for adaptation arose, it found itself unable to adapt. It inertly died of discouragement. That happened to many primitive peoples before."

She had no reason to lie, but it was hard to believe.

"We hoped for so much," I protested. "Everything was opening before us. We were learning. We were going to reach out to other planets and beyond."

"Ingenious you certainly were, but each new discovery was a toy. You never considered its true worth. And you were a greedy, childishly aggressive people. You developed science without developing philosophy. Philosophy without science is fruitless speculation, likely to degenerate into superstition and ignorant quibbling. But science without philosophy is equally fruitless research that leads to pedantry, stasis, dogma."

"That's rather hard on us. We had very complex problems."

"Mostly concerned with preservation of forms and habits. It never seems to have occurred to you that in Nature life is growth, and preservation is an accident. What is preserved in the rocks or in ice is only the image of life, but you were always regarding local taboos as eternal verities."

My mind switched suddenly to my present situation. "But suppose I were to go back and tell them what is going to happen. It would alter things. Doesn't that show I'm not going back?"

She smiled. "You think they would listen to you while they neglect philosophy, Terry?"

"Anyway," I said, "I don't intend to go back. I don't like your world. I think it is decadent, and in many ways immoral, but at least I am a whole human being here."

She shook her head. "So young, Terry. So sure of right and wrong. It's rather sweet."

"It's not sweet at all," I said, brusquely. "There have to be standards. Without standards, where are you?"

"Well, where? Where's a tree, or a flower, or a butterfly?"

"We're more than plants."

"What do you do about opposing standards? Go gloriously to war?"

I dropped that.

"Did we get to other planets?" I asked.

"No, but the next civilization did. They found Mars too old, Venus too young. You had a dream of men spreading out over the Universe; I'm afraid that never happened, though it was tried again later. They bred men specially for it as they bred them for all kinds of things. In fact, they produced some very strange men and women, highly specialized, who were even more zealous for order than your people—they would not admit chance, which is a great stupidity. When their end came, it was disastrous. None of the specialized types could survive. The population dwindled down to a few hundred thousand who had enough adaptability to start over again."

"So you have come to distrust order and standards?"

"We have ceased to think of society as a structural engineering problem, or of individuals as components for assembly into some arbitrary pattern."

"And you just sit and wait supinely for the end?"

"Oh, no! We preserve ourselves as material for chance to work on. Life was an accident in the beginning; survival has often been an accident. Maybe there'll be no more accidents. On the other hand, there may."

"That sounds very near defeatism."

"In the end, defeat and the cold must come. First to the Solar System, then the Galaxy, then the Universe, and the rest will be silence. Not to admit that is a foolish vanity." She paused. "Yet one grows flowers because they are lovely, not because one wishes them to live for ever."

I did not like that world. It was as foreign as another planet might have been. The strain to understand was constant and wearisome; it was also unprofitable. Whatever comfort and ease I had there were centered in Clytassamine. For her I pulled down the barriers I had so bitterly erected around myself in the last few years, and I fell the more deeply in love on account of them.

Thus there was a second reason not to let things happen as Hymorell had planned. Even Clytassamine could not make the place heaven, but I had got out of hell and I intended to stay out.

I spent unnumbered hours poring over the transference machine, learning all I could of it. My progress was slow, but some idea of the way it operated did begin at last to come to me.

But I could not settle. The feeling of transience would not leave me, and the days began to pass in long, nagging uncertainty. There was no way of telling whether Hymorell would be successful in getting all the equipment he needed. I had a haunting, mind's-eye picture of him in my wheelchair, working away on the contrivance which would condemn me to suffering in that broken body again.

As the weeks went by, the strain began to affect me, and I grew tense. I was afraid to go to sleep lest the next time I woke I should find myself back in that chair.

Clytassamine, too, began to look worried. Her genuine sympathy over my distress at the idea of going back was confused by her feeling for Hymorell, who must now be suffering what I had. There was also the fact that my mental strain wasn't doing my temporary body any good, either.

And then, when six uneventful months had begun to give me hope, it happened without sign or warning. I went to sleep in the room of the great green building; I woke back home — with a raging pain in my missing leg.

All was just as it had been. So much so that I reached right away for the dope bottle.

When I grew calmer, I found

something which had not been there before. It was on the table beside me, looking like a radio set partially assembled. I certainly had not built it. Except for that, the whole thing might have been a dream.

I leaned back in my chair, considering that mass of wiring very carefully. Then I started to examine it closely, touching nothing. It was, of course, crude in construction, compared with the transference machine I had studied in the place that Clytassamine had called Cathalu, but I began to see similarities and notice adaptations. I was still looking at it when I fell asleep.

By the number of hours I slept, I knew Hymorell must have been driving my body without letup.

WHEN I awoke, I began to think frantically. My spell of soundness and health had left me with one firm decision — I would not remain an amputee.

There were two ways out. The first, the dope bottle, had always been there for the taking and still was. But now there was the transference instrument.

I did not understand a lot about it. I doubted whether I could successfully retune it if I tried, and I did not wish to try. For one thing, little though I liked that other world, Clytassamine would be there to help me.

For another, what I had learned made me think that I might easily land somewhere even less desirable. So I left it on Hymorell's setting.

The chief difficulty I foresaw was that the machine must remain. He had had to leave it, but had never guessed, I suppose, that I'd be able to use it. And if I were to use it, I'd have to leave it there for him to use again. My object must be to stop him doing that.

It would be risky to set the machine to destroy itself after I changed places with him. The process is to some extent hypnotic and by no means instantaneous. Something very queer indeed would be likely to happen if it were destroyed while the transmission was in progress.

Besides, he would be able to build another. As long as he existed, he would be able to.

That made the answer fairly obvious.

When I had made my plan, I tried the instrument several times, but he was awake and wary. I saw that I would have to catch him asleep, as he had caught me, so I went on trying at intervals of four hours.

I don't know whether he outguessed me or whether he was just lucky. I had got hold of the poison a year before to keep by me in case things became unbearable. My first idea was to swallow it in a capsule which would take some little time to dissolve. But then I realized what would happen if something went wrong and I could not make the transfer in time. That scared away from the scheme. Instead, I poured the poison into the dope bottle. The crystals were white, just like the dope itself, only a little larger.

Once I got a response from the instrument, it was easier than I had expected. I took hold of the two handles and concentrated all my attention on the lens. I felt giddy. The room swayed and blurred.

When it cleared, I was back in that green room, with Clytassamine beside me.

I reached my hand toward her, and then stopped, for I could hear her quietly crying. I had never known her to do that before.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

For a moment she went absolutely quiet. Then she said, incredulously: "It's — it's Terry?"

"Well, sure. I told you I wasn't going to be kept back there."

She started to cry again, but differently. I put my arm around her.

After a while, I asked: "What is it? What's all this about?"

She sniffed. "It's Hymorell. Your world has done something dreadful to him. When he came

back, he was harsh and bitter. He kept talking of pain and suffering. I was afraid of him; he was — cruel."

It did not greatly surprise me, for they knew nothing of illness and physical discomfort. If a body became in the least defective, they transferred. They had never had to learn to bear suffering.

"Why didn't it do that to you, too?" she asked.

"I think it did at first," I admitted. "But you find out after a while that that just makes things tougher."

"I was afraid of him; he was cruel," she repeated.

I kept myself awake for forty-eight hours, to make sure. I knew that one of the first things he would need when he woke was the dope, but I had to give him time to take it. Then I let myself sleep.

When I opened my eyes, I was back in the hospital. It was no slow awakening. I knew in a flash that he had somehow suspected the bottle of poison and avoided it. The instrument was beside me and I saw a thin curl of smoke rising from it, as though a cigarette had been left burning. I began to reach toward it, but then caution checked me. I caught the leads and pulled them out. In among the wiring, I found a small can with a glowing fuse attached. I flung the can hastily through the window. He too, however, had had to allow a safety margin: it was half an hour before the explosive went off.

I looked at the dope. I needed it badly, but I didn't dare to touch it. I trundled my chair over to the cupboard where the spare supply was kept. When I took out the bottle, though, I hesitated. It looked like the real stuff and intact — but then, of course, it was essential that it should.

Deliberately, I threw it into the fireplace, smashing the bottle, and wheeled my chair to the telephone. The doctor was pretty nasty to me, but he came, bringing the stuff with him, thank God.

Various plans occurred to me. A poisoned needle, for instance, set strategically in the arm of the chair. But the disabled have so little privacy. It is difficult enough to get the deadlier poisons, anyway; when it can be done only by finding a third party ready to break the law, it becomes virtually impossible. And if someone did do it for me, he would later appear as an accessory to suicide. The same objection applied to laying my hands on a few sticks of dynamite. But I could buy a time-switch without any trouble — and I did.

It was, I thought, a neat arrangement. My old Army pistol was trained on the exact position my head would occupy when I was at the instrument. Only if you were searching for it would you notice the muzzle looking out from the bookshelves. It was fixed to fire when the two handles of the instrument were grasped — but not until the time-switch was on. Thus I could set the switch and operate the instrument. Two hours later, for safe margin, the switch would go over and the thing became lethal. If I tried and failed to make contact. I had only to set the switch again.

I waited three days, knowing that Hymorell would be as wary of sleep as I had been, and uncertain whether his little grenade had been successful. Then I tried successfully.

But three days later, I was back again in my chair.

HYMORELL, damn him, was cautious; he must have spotted the extra lead to the switch right away. It had been snipped off.

But I found his little surprise package too — I would have melted the instrument, and most likely myself along with it, if I had touched it before disconnecting. (The switch was thermostatic this time, set to cut in as the room cooled down — very neat.)

The pistol and the time-switch had vanished, and I set about looking for them everywhere within range of my chair. I didn't find the pistol, but the switch was in the cupboard under the stairs. It was arranged to set off a percussion cap which would ignite a gray powder obviously taken from the pistol cartridges. There were paper and oily rags close by.

Once I had made sure there were no other boobytraps around. I settled down to work out another little reception device of my own. I had been caught by a type of mine the Germans used which didn't go up until the seventh truck had passed over it. The idea had its points.

I spent a couple of days fixing that. The transference machine, meanwhile, created other problems. I changed places with Hymorell, then returned involuntarily, and got back there again.

I was getting sick of the game, but it seemed to be a duel which could only end with one of us outsmarting the other. It was a stupid battle with too many risks for both of us. And neither of us dared to sleep.

"Look here," I said to Clytassamine. "Suppose I were to transfer to one of the feebleminded the way you people do. Then when Hymorell operates again, it will be the halfwit who will take my place in the chair. We'll both be

here and the whole thing will be solved."

She shook her head. "You need some sleep, Terry. You're getting fuddled. It's your *mind* he's working the exchange with. It wouldn't make any difference what kind of body you were using."

She was right, of course — I was fuddled. On the third day. I just had to sleep. It lasted about fourteen of their hours and I woke up in the green hall.

I couldn't believe he'd let that length of time pass without making an attempt, if he were in any condition to do so. My little gadget must have gotten rid of him this time.

I began to feel easier.

As the days went on, I grew sure of my success. My dread of sleep diminished. At last I began to feel like a citizen of this other world and to look for my place in it. With unlimited time ahead of me, I didn't intend to spend it hanging around the way the rest of them did.

"Maybe there *is* only chance now," I said to Clytassamine, "but didn't you ever hear of *making* chances?"

She smiled, it seemed to me, a little wearily.

"Yes," she admitted, "I know. I felt like that for my first two generations. You are so young, Terry." She sat looking at me wistfully and a little sadly.

Why the change should suddenly have come over me then, I can't say. Maybe it wasn't that sudden, but had been working up a while; as I looked back at her, I found myself seeing her quite differently. A cold feeling came over me. I saw beyond her perfect form and young loveliness.

Inside, she was old — old and wearied — old far beyond my reach. She thought of me as a child, and had been treating me as one. The vigor of my true youth had amused her. Perhaps it revived her own for a while. Now she was tired of it and of me. The freshness I had seen was nothing but a sham.

I must have stared at her quite a while. "You don't want me any more. You want Hymorell."

"Yes, Terry," she admitted quietly.

For the next day or two I pondered over what to do. I had never liked that world. It was effete and decaying. What pleasantness there had been had vanished. I felt imprisoned, stifled, appalled at the prospect of spending several lifetimes in it.

Now that a return to my former torment seemed improbable, the prospect here looked, in another way, little better. I began to wonder whether mortality wasn't one of life's more desirable qualities. It's frightening in most

ways, but more frightening was the prospect of an almost eternal existence. You can't believe that until you're faced with it.

But my worry was unnecessary; I'm in no danger of immortality or anything like it. I went to sleep despondently in the great green building, and when I awoke I was in this mental institution instead of *either* the future *or* the hospital. And I wasn't in either Hymorell's body or my own — *I was in somebody else's!*

THERE was a male attendant nearby, cleaning up around the bed. I knew better than to ask where and who I was; I had to get oriented first, on my own, without arousing comment or getting into whatever kind of trouble Hymorell might have cooked up for me. So I just lay there, watching the attendant.

But he turned around and saw my eyes on him. He gave a start, began approaching the bed, then abruptly ducked out. He came back a little later with a doctor, who lifted my lids and stared at the pupils, tried my reflexer and finally stood erect, his arms folded grimly while he stared at me.

"What's your name?" he asked.

I didn't answer.

"Do you know where you are?"

"In a hospital," I said.

"Remember how you got here?"

As a matter of fact, I wasn't sure at all. Until I was, I had no intention of talking. That didn't stop them from putting me through a whole series of tests. By the time they finished, I realized why my silence hadn't accomplished anything.

Hymorell had transferred me to the body of a feebleminded man named Stephen Dallboy. When the male attendant had turned and seen the light of intelligence in Dallboy's eyes, it hadn't mattered whether I spoke or not, and the tests had amazed the doctors because, not knowing the situation, I had given normal responses. All except my name.

I don't altogether understand how Hymorell worked the stunt. He must have been as tired as I was of the dangerous game we'd been playing. The way I see it, he probably built another transference machine and used it to locate some accessible body in the present. That would be easy — just think of the number of patients in mental institutions he had to choose from! He happened to pick this Stephen Dallboy, a congenital imbecile, transferred me into that body, and presumably transferred himself back into his own in the future.

Then what had happened to my body? Stephen Dallboy must be in it, naturally. Being feebleminded, he wouldn't even try to work the apparatus, and I was

confined to the asylum, unable to get to the machine.

It was a shrewd solution, taking me completely away from the transfer instrument but it got me sore. He could have transferred me into a body that wasn't under confinement, couldn't he? More important, though, Dallboy was a charity case, whereas I'd inherited money — not much, but enough to make a difference — and I would need it if I could ever get out of the institution.

I wrote a letter, signing it Stephen Dallboy, and asked about Terry Molton, whom I claimed as an acquaintance. The male attendant mailed it for me; I'd counted on him as a possible ally and won his friendship by playing chess with him.

The answer came back from the hospital, stating that Terry Molton was dead. He had apparently electrocuted himself with some experimental radio apparatus. The resulting fuse had started a fire in the room, which had been discovered and put out before it could spread, but not in time to save Molton.

Well, what did that signify? The fire had been detected about three hours after I had awakened to find myself in this asylum. Did that mean Hymorell deliberately set the boobytrap to destroy the equipment and Dallboy along with it, so I or anybody else wouldn't be able to pull him back into the present . . . or was it Hymorell who died in my body while Dallboy, still imbecilic, was in Hymorell's in the future?

I decided it didn't make a damned bit of difference. Getting even with somebody who won't be born for maybe thousands of years makes no sense, especially for some poor guy to whom being alive or dead was the same thing. And my immediate situation is one hell of a lot more urgent.

If I pretend to be Stephen Dallboy, I am an imbecile committed to an asylum . . . and I can't get back my own money. If I claim to be Terry Molton, I can be proved insane . . . and I still can't collect my money. I don't know what to do, except convince the doctors here that I'm normal enough to be released.

That wouldn't be so bad, come to thing of it, money or no money. I at least have all the parts of a passable body now. And I ought to be able to use this body profitably in the kind of world I understand. So I've gained a lot more than I lost.

Nevertheless, I *am* Terry Molton.

DALLBOY'S, as you will realize, is a well integrated hallucination, but if there is nothing more serious we shall undoubtedly have to release the patient

in due course, as we see fit.

However, we do feel that we should acquaint you with one or two discrepant points. One is that, although the two men appear never to have met, Stephen Dallboy is informed in remarkably intimate detail of Terence Molton's affairs. Another is that, when confronted for test purposes with two friends of Molton's, he immediately addressed them by name and seemed to know all about them — to their great astonishment, for they have never to their knowledge met him before. Also, they state he does not in the least resemble Terence Molton.

Nevertheless, you will find herewith full legal proof that the patient is indeed Stephen Dallboy. Should there be any further developments, we will keep you advised.

Yours truly,
Jesse K. Johnson
(Medical Director)

—JOHN WYNDHAM