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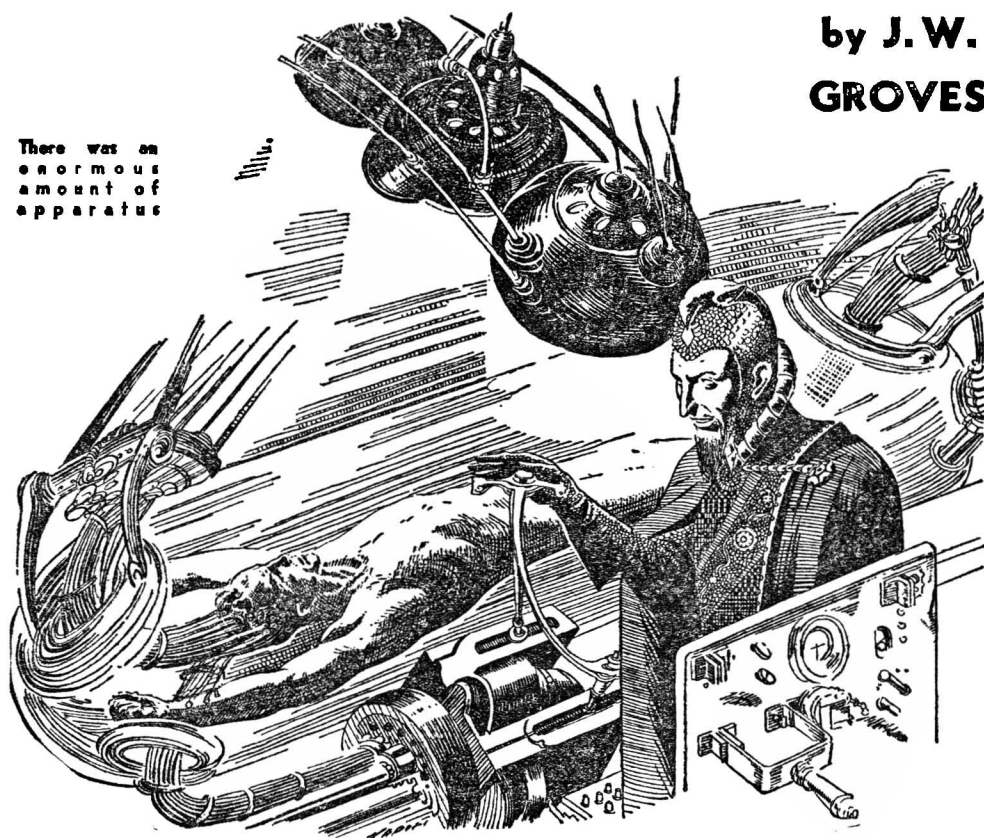
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REGROWTH

by J. W.
GROVES

There was an enormous amount of apparatus



Ruthless Doctor Sutgen performs a weird experiment in cellular development — with some amazing consequences!

I WALKED very carefully along the corridor of the hospital. My new leg was still a little wobbly. Nothing wrong with it, of course. There never is anything wrong with a new part after a Sutgen regrowth, but naturally the freshly-acquired muscles are soft, unexercised.

There was a bench half way along the corridor. One end of it was already occupied by a youngish, thin-faced man dressed in dark clothing. Feeling in

need of a rest I flopped onto the other end of the seat. "Excuse me," I said. "But have you seen a lady in a red coat?"

"I'm sorry, but I haven't," he said.

"She's my wife," I explained. "She promised to meet me here." I grinned and went on, "I expect she's still dithering about coming up the grav-shaft. We have the old-fashioned elevators at our apartment house."

He smiled pleasantly. "Being

swooshed up an open tube without any floor under you, is rather terrifying if you aren't used to it," he sympathized.

I nodded. "It's a funny thing about my wife. Normally she's scared stiff by all sorts of things. Grav-shafts and mice and thunderstorms. You'd have thought she was just the one to faint away with sheer terror when I had my leg crushed under that truck. But she didn't. She got me clear, stopped the bleeding, escorted me to the hospital, just as if she'd been used to handling casualties all her life."

"Women are like that," he commented. "They'll panic over trivialities, but at the bottom there is a streak of hard common sense in them. If any really big trouble crops up, you can trust them to think of the right thing to do—and do it."

The conversation languished a little after that. Trying to find a polite way of reviving it I asked, "Are you waiting to meet a patient, or have you just had some part regrown?"

"Neither," he answered as he smiled. "I work here."

All the time that I had been talking to him I had a vague feeling at the back of my mind that there was something familiar about his face. As soon as he said that I remembered why. "Of course!" I said. "You're Walker!"

"I— Well, yes. I suppose I am. In a way. It's a moot point really."

I must have looked as astonished as I felt.

"What do you mean? Don't you know whether you are or not?"

It was his turn to look surprised. "Do you mean to say you haven't heard about me? I thought everybody who has ever come within a mile of this place knew. It's such common talk. Although of course Sutgen has managed to keep it out of the papers and journals so far."

"I don't know anything about you beyond that you were Sutgen's assistant at the time the discovery was made," I admitted.

"Guinea pig would be more correct, perhaps," he said. "Although assistant was my official position. It was ten years ago that I first came to this hospital, raw and nervous, and was assigned to help Sutgen with his investigations."

THE man grinned in an odd sort of way and went on:

"Professionally that was a piece of good luck for me, although I didn't know it at the time. But from any other point of view it was a bad break. Indeed I think I got the job only because nobody who knew the ropes could be induced to take it.

"Sutgen is a terrible man to work with. Bad-tempered, foul-mouthed, and with as much consideration for the feelings and rights of his underlings as an old-fashioned slave driver.

"One thing I must say for the old gorilla, though. He is fanatically devoted to science. Too much so if anything. He's the type that you could imagine in the role of one of those story book villains. The unscrupulous scientist who goes around vivisectioning human beings in the search for new knowledge.

"You know the line of investigation he was working on at the time, of course. Primitive forms of life, and certain of the crustacea, can regrow practically any major part of their body if they lose it. The process is a mysterious one, but Sutgen was of the opinion that the secret of it lay in what he termed the cell memory—that is to say that every cell in an individual body contains within itself the pattern of the whole, and can, under the correct stimulus, reproduce that whole or any part of it.

"He was convinced that this applied not only to the cells of the lower creatures, but to those of all living things, including man. He believed that the ability to utilize this for the purposes of re-creation was not completely lost, but had just become, as it were, misplaced somewhere along the line of evolutionary development.

"Furthermore he was convinced that this latent power could be revived.

"We know now that he was right, but I don't think anybody believed it at the time. At any rate I know I didn't. The whole business seemed to me as futile as chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. And when, on top of that, I began to learn just what a bully Sutgen is I soon worked myself into a state of rebellion. I'm pretty sure I should have broken completely with Sutgen and the whole hospital within a few weeks of my coming there if it hadn't been for Susan. She's my wife now— At least—

"Anyway, at the time she was a young student. We met by accident in the grounds of the place while I was taking an airing during one of my very few periods of leisure. And, as young people will when they find themselves attracted towards each other, we began to have quite a lot of such accidents. Before long I made up my mind that I would stick it where I was, rather than go off somewhere else and see less of her.

"After six months we decided that we would marry as soon as we were in a position to do so. Though just when that would be I couldn't for the life of me foresee.

"Late one evening—too late for my liking, for I knew that before long Susan would be outside waiting for me—Sutgen and I were working on a new experiment that he had just devised. It involved the irradiation of living tissue with some of the shorter electro-magnetic waves, while at the same time subjecting it to the effects of stimulating drugs. He had been fiddling with his apparatus for over an hour without saying a word, when suddenly he raised his head and barked 'Adrenalin.'

"I was impatient to be gone, but I knew better than to mention it. Instead I turned and went to get what he wanted.

"During the years that he had spent in that stuffy little laboratory of his, he had managed to accumulate an enormous amount of apparatus, though how he succeeded in squeezing the appropriations out of the board is more than I can understand.

"At any rate, there the stuff was, standing in every corner, littering the floor and shelves, jammed under the bench.

"The bottle he needed was on a high shelf in the corner of the room, out of my reach. It wouldn't have taken a moment to fetch some steps, but being young and silly and in a hurry I didn't bother. Instead I clambered on top of a small cupboard that was immediately under the shelf.

"I would have been all right even then if I'd watched my step, but my eyes were on the bottle, not on where I was going. Just as I was stretched out to my full height, I trod onto the round metal case of a clinical thermom-

eter. The thing rolled away from under me, I did an ungraceful pirouette, and fell onto the bench in front of Sutgen.

SUTGEN went purple and began screaming in his usual manner. 'You clumsy young fool! Why the blazes, didn't you be more careful—'

"I rolled over and lowered my feet to the floor. I knew I had hurt myself, especially my hand, but for the moment I was too sick and dizzy with the pain to realize exactly what had happened. Then I saw.

"As I was falling I had instinctively put out my hand to save myself. In front of the long row of glowing tubes that he had been using, Sutgen had placed a glass jar containing the newest specimen. I had smashed the jar, and ground the broken glass into my flesh. My palm was lacerated in a dozen places, and the first finger was hanging only by a thin shred of skin.

"Sutgen broke off his tirade.

"'Here,' he said gruffly. 'Let me fix that for you, you blasted young idiot.'

"I let him stop the bleeding, and send me over to the accident ward to have it bandaged properly.

"On the way there I had a chance to think, with the result that I felt sicker than ever. The loss of that finger was going to be a serious handicap to me in my career. And now I had Susan to think of as well as myself.

"The healing of my hand seemed to proceed normally enough at first, except that the flesh of the palm knitted together rather more quickly than was to be expected. It wasn't until the end of the fourth week after my fall that I noticed a small, hairlike pink growth beginning to sprout from the severed stump of my finger.

"I was rather worried about it at the start. I feared that some malignant growth had been set going by the effect of the sudden loss of the member—though I could recall no such previous case in recorded medical history.

"Then, when the thing had become as thick as a matchstick I noticed a horny speck of fingernail at the top of it. I knew then what was happening! I was so excited that I rushed straight over to Sutgen, though it was strictly against his rules for anyone to interrupt him at his work.

"For once in his life, though, the old boy forgave me even that. When I showed the newly developing finger he grew almost incoherent with excitement.

" 'I've done it!' he chortled. 'I've done it! You must have jolted my radiation apparatus slightly when you fell, and turned up just the right combination. One effective enough to make further stimulation by drugs unnecessary. Of course I don't know exactly what you did, but I do know what I was using at the time. It won't take long to trace the change you made.'

"He began to flex the new finger, and examine it through a magnifying glass to see if it was developing the normal skin markings. I believe that if I had let him he would have dissected it to find out if the muscles and the bone contents were as they should be. And then he said something that made me shudder a little even at that time—though I didn't realize the full significance of it.

" 'What a pity,' he remarked, 'that I didn't keep the piece of separated tissue. It would have been interesting to put it in a nutrient solution, and see what happened to it.'

" 'I'm glad you didn't,' I snapped.

"He seemed surprised. 'Why?'

"Well—I don't know exactly. It seems a gruesome idea to me."

"He spoke with a return to his usual tone. 'Nonsense. Gruesome. A true scientist shouldn't know the meaning of the word.'

"As soon as I had finished with him I hurried away to find Susan. I knew she would be delighted to learn that I was going to get my finger back again. Well, although I had played a rather ignominiously minor part in the making of the great discovery, I knew that the fact I had been working with Sutgen at the time was bound to bring me a little reflected fame, and be a help to me in my future career. It didn't put a definite date to our marriage, but it did seem to bring it nearer.

DURING the next couple of months or so life was rosy. The most affectionate mother in the world could not have watched over her baby with more loving care than Sutgen and I watched over that baby finger of mine. And as soon as it was plain that it was going to grow back to its normal size

and shape, we set about trying to find the exact combination of rays that had produced it.

"That didn't take us too long. Sutgen's radiation gadget is a sturdy affair, and even my crashing down on the bench in front of it hadn't upset the readings to any very great extent. The vital figures, we found, were only slightly different from those he had been working with.

"It is said the ancients believed that the gods grow jealous if a man has too much luck.

"The first intimations I had that there might be something in their theory were several attacks of what I thought to be acute indigestion. Then a constant, gnawing pain that located itself definitely in the right side of my abdomen. I could have diagnosed what was wrong with myself easily enough if I'd thought out the full implications of my regrown finger, but foolishly I let old habits of thought hide the truth from me, until one day when I was working with Sutgen the pain suddenly became so excruciating that I doubled up with it.

"I knew what was the matter with me. I had appendicitis.

"Sutgen raised his eyebrows and informed me that plenty of people get it.

"But I knew I had had it before. My appendix had been taken out when I was a kid. Those rays of his must have affected my whole body. This wasn't going to be so good. An appendectomy every six months was an expensive price to pay for a new finger.

"Sutgen informed me it would not be as bad as all that. The majority of people went right through their lives without knowing they had an appendix. He claimed I had just been unlucky, and told me to have this one out. The odds were that I'd never be troubled by the next one. He even offered to do the operation for me and promised he wouldn't even charge me anything.

"I was agreeably surprised by the offer. I knew he was a competent surgeon, but he hadn't bothered himself with routine operations for years. The accidental assistance that I had given him in making his discovery must have put him in a generous mood. At least, that's what I thought at the time. I should have known Sutgen better.

"I accepted with thanks. Fortunately there was a bed vacant in the hospital

at the time, and as I had already left things longer than I should, we decided that the operation had better be performed right away. Within an hour he had me under the anesthetic.

"My awakening was slow. I remember opening my eyes several times, and then closing them again through sheer lack of interest in the messages they brought me. I was not exactly incurious, but rather unaware that there was anything to be curious about.

"I lay in that condition for hours. Then, gradually, self-awareness began to creep back to me. I became a person again, instead of a mere perceiver of disconnected sensations. Fleeting snatches of memory came. I stirred uneasily. There was something, something about myself and my surroundings, that I ought to know!

"Overhead was a single, glaring yellow blob. And all around me a pattern of reddish colored oblongs, separated from each other by streaks of dirty white. Here and there were widespreading stains of black dust. The final stage of self-realization was swift, and with its completion I sat up in the bed in alarm. I had been sick. Operated upon. I ought to be in hospital. But this place was no hospital ward. It was a cellar!

"I looked around for a bell push, or some other means of summoning assistance. There was nothing. So I tried shouting. My voice echoed back to me hollowly from the walls of the place, but nobody came. Finally, after sliding my legs over the edge of the bed and trying them carefully to see if I was strong enough, I got up and began to search for my clothes. They were not there.

BY this time I was in a high rage, and pulling a blanket off the bed I wrapped it round myself, determined to explore until I found somebody from whom I could demand an explanation. The door, which was behind the bed, was unlocked. I ascended the steep, narrow flight of stairs that led from the cellar.

"I was fully aware that I was in Sutgen's house. I had visited the place only twice before, but I had no difficulty in recognizing it. The discovery, however, answered only the first of my questions. Why had Sutgen brought me here? And how the devil had he prevailed on the

authorities at the hospital to allow such a thing?

"A swift search soon convinced me that the house was empty. I suppose that as I had just got up from a sick bed and was very thinly clothed, I should really have stayed indoors until somebody returned. But I was too bewildered and in far too much of a bad temper to think of doing the most prudent thing. As soon as I had satisfied myself that there really was nobody about I opened the front door and plunged out into the street.

"I bumped straight into Susan. 'Thank the Lord!' I said huskily. 'Susan, what's all this about? Do you know?'

"She gaped at me. 'I think I should be asking you that,' she said. 'How did you get down here, anyway? And why come undressed like that? When I left you at the hospital ten minutes ago—'

"'Ten minutes ago!' I shouted. 'But that's impossible! I know I've been in that cellar for a long, long, time.'

"I was shivering now, partly from the chill of the street air, and partly from fear. The Universe seemed suddenly to have gone mad. Either the Universe or I.

"Bewilderment and the beginnings of terror made me irrational. I felt that Susan was in with some general conspiracy against me, and I wanted to beg her to drop it. "'Susan,'" I said. "'Listen. Please. You said you loved me. Promised to marry me. And now—'

"'Promised!' Her voice rose to a squeak with sheer astonishment. 'But I did marry you! A month ago!'

"She was worried now. Badly worried. She caught my arm beneath its blanket covering, and insisted that I come home. She thought I had been working too hard lately.

"Over her shoulder I caught sight of Sutgen hurrying towards us. I broke free of her grip and went up to him, demanding an immediate explanation.

"I saw that he was frightened. He begged me to come back into the house. Susan was also demanding an explanation.

"He almost jumped into the air at the suggestion. He claimed that any explanation was impossible at that time. He soothed Susan into going home. Telling her that her husband would be there soon and everything would turn out satisfactorily. He had his key out by now, and suddenly he flung open the

door of his house and thrust me inside. For a moment I heard Susan's voice exclaiming indignantly that she wanted to know what it was all about. Then suddenly the sound was cut off by the slamming of the heavy door.

"I'm sorry about this," Sutgen began pacifyingly. 'But I had to do it. You became aware of yourself before I expected it, and so I didn't have time to explain anything to you. And I couldn't leave you out there. He might have come along any minute.'

"He?" I asked incredulously. 'Whom do you mean?'

"Walker."

"Walker? But I'm—"

"And then the whole monstrous story became clear to me. I trembled and felt sick with impotent fury. I could have killed Sutgen. Indeed, for a minute or two I tried to, but he is a bigger man than I am, and soon threw me off."

"Don't be an ungrateful fool," he snarled. 'What are you grumbling about? If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't exist.'

"Though I'm ashamed to admit it I began to cry then. It wasn't only myself I was thinking of. It was Susan. What was she going to do when she learned about it? It was enough to drive any woman mad!"

JUST at this time, Doctor Walker broke off his story and turned his head as there came the sound of a door opening at the end of the corridor. I blinked slightly with astonishment as I saw the man who came through. I had read a great deal about Walker, but I never knew that he had a twin brother. Yet the man approaching us from the door was an almost exact duplicate of the one sitting beside me. Hair, features, build, clothes. In one respect only did they differ. Walker wore a red tie. This man was wearing a blue one.

The doctor faced me again. "I see there's no need for me to tell you the end of my little history," he chuckled. "You can guess the rest."

I was dumber than he gave me credit for being. "Why no. I'm afraid I can't."

"Come now," he admonished with a grin. "Remember what I told you about Sutgen's theory? That every cell contains within itself a memory pattern of the whole organism, and under the correct stimulus can reproduce that whole. Remember, too, what the scientific monomaniac wanted to do with my finger!"

I gasped. "Of course. The separated tissue from that operation. He kept it. And it grew into you." I was genuinely horrified now. "Heavens, man. No wonder you were worried about your—his wife's sanity. It must have been terrible."

He shook his head, smiling. "You underestimate her. As we men generally do underestimate their sex. We had to tell her eventually. Of course, but as I said before, women may panic over trivialities, but at the bottom there is a streak of hard common sense in them. If any really big trouble crops up you can trust them to think of the right thing to do and do it."

Another door in the corridor began to open. The doctor inclined his head courteously. "And now I must leave you," he said. "Good afternoon." With that he rose and joined the duplicate of himself.

The door opened wider. Through it came two women, one wearing a red scarf, one wearing a blue scarf.

The one with the blue scarf was young, slim, dark-haired and vivacious, with wide-set brown eyes that gleamed of mischief, and full red lips that were curved into a smile of welcome.

The one with the red scarf was young, slim, dark-haired and vivacious, with wide-set brown eyes that gleamed of mischief, and full red lips that were curved into a smile of welcome.

The Dr. Walker who was wearing a blue tie went up to the woman who was wearing a blue scarf. The Dr. Walker who was wearing a red tie went up to the woman who was wearing a red scarf.

"Hullo, Sue darling!" they said simultaneously.

