

Among Our Contributors

ROSEL G. BROWN —

one of the most interesting newcomers in the field, has appeared in this magazine previously and had a story in Fredrik Pohl's STAR SCIENCE FICTION NO. 5.

AUGUST DERLETH —

equally prominent in the mystery field as the creator of the inimitable Solar Pons pastiches, is of course the author of some superb material in the Lovecraft tradition.

GORDON R. DICKSON —

appears only once in Don Day's monumental Index to the SF magazines 1926-'50. Since then, he has appeared in every magazine in the field and is the author of several novels.

JOHN BRUNNER —

prominent British SF and fantasy writer and novelist, makes one of his rare appearances in this haunting story about the adventures of Gerald Howson, Psi.D., Curative Telepath First Class, W.H.O. The sequel will appear next month.

LESTER DEL REY —

needs no introduction to any reader of SF and fantasy.

WENZELL BROWN —

author of more than twenty novels about contemporary matters makes, we believe, a first appearance in the field with this article.

Dr. LESLIE R. SHEPHERD —

distinguished British physicist and space-travel authority, writes on SPACE PHYSICS in an article published here through the courtesy of Mr. Sam Moskowitz, former editor of SCIENCE FICTION PLUS.

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also needs no introduction to any reader of science fiction.

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SAVE YOUR CONFEDERATE MONEY, BOYS

by ROSEL G. BROWN

IT WAS not, of course, the sort of thing that happens to the ordinary person.

But then Grandfather Mayberry was not the ordinary person, even to begin with. When Walter—I don't think it's respectful to refer to your grandfather as Walter, either, but we were never allowed to call him anything else. He was frequently referred to in the family as Yankee Walter, but no one ever said it to his face. It happened that his mother, great-grandfather's first wife, was from Massachusetts and because of this everyone always thought of Walter as being a little bit *different*. I think maybe this might account for a lot of Walter's peculiarities. I mean when people expect you to be a little peculiar all the time—well, as Walter's descendant I can understand how he felt. Whenever anyone mentions something like Protointegrationist somebody looks a little guiltily over at me as though I

caused the second secession and whoever mentions it in front of me is being tactless.

I was only a child then.

And I remember thinking it was awful to secede and not have anybody care. I mean to have big industry just move away and to get poorer and poorer and have to pick the cotton yourself.

And wrap it in tissue paper and sell it to the tourists for ten cents a boll—Confederate money.

But look at it this way. Your Confederate money's worth something now. And why?

Well, when Walter announced, back in 1990, that he had no intention of dying, I was immensely relieved. If Walter said he wasn't going to die that winter, he wasn't going to. So I had Mama spray on the tightest corset I could stand and took off for my year of Precollege with a light heart and a twenty-inch waist.

I didn't really expect to be able to pass the college boards, even with Precollege. And if I did, I wouldn't have been able to go to college. It was all the family could do to send the boys. But Mama didn't want anyone to say her girls weren't educated, so we all went to Precollege and gracefully flunked the college boards.

It was that summer—after my two semesters of Precollege—that I brought the Price boy back with me, Jerry Price. I ended up not marrying him, of course. He really wouldn't have done at all, but boy, could he court!

Well, I was all watery-eyed and pink-skinned over Jerry then and I knew the family would just love him and I sort of hoped he'd stay more than just two or three days. I mean if he could find a summer job maybe he could stay until September 15, which was the date for the college boards. The thing was, would Jerry like the family?

"The one I really want you to meet," I told him, feeling a little uneasy about it, "is my grandfather. Walter."

"You call him Walter?"

"Yes. Er...he's a real character. You know... The thing is, though, he's almost bedridden."

"*Bedridden?* You mean rocking chair ridden?"

"No. Bedridden. I know it sounds unusual, but my grandfather Mayberry refused to take his chloesterol pills. Or antichloesterol pills, or whatever it is. He said they weren't Natural. And now it's too late. He's ruined his arteries."

"It takes a real character to do something like that."

I didn't like Jerry's tone of voice, but I couldn't help but agree with it. Maybe Walter wasn't a character. Maybe he was just stupid.

"The thing is," I said, because the postbellum buggy was almost there, "that the extra cot is in his room and

you'll have to sleep there. I mean I'm sure you'll find Walter an interesting character."

"Sure," Jerry said.

Surely, I thought, Jerry will not disapprove of the bottle under Walter's pillow or his swearing or his insulting—but then even Walter wouldn't be able to find anything insulting to say about Jerry.

The house looked silent and empty when we drove up. Cousin Dickie helped me out of the buggy and held out his hand. I didn't put anything in it so he drove off in a huff and left a whirlwind of dust for us to track into the house.

I swang open the screen door and yelled, "Yoo-hoo!" But I could hear it echo way to the kitchen without striking anything soft.

"Must be out showing the end of the season tourists around," I said. "The trains are all local here and they never run on time so nobody knew just when we'd be in. I mean, if they'd known, they'd certainly all be here to welcome you."

"Sure," Jerry said.

Really, I thought, they could have left somebody. It all seemed such an anticlimax.

"Well," I said, "there's still Walter. You'll want to bring your bags up, anyway."

Halfway up the stairs I stopped. I could hear water splashing and a quavery voice singing, "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree."

Oh, Lord, I thought. He's gone and gotten drunk in the bath tub again and there's no one to get him out.

Jerry looked at me with raised eyebrows.

"Grandfather Mayberry," I explained, "remembers all the old World War songs. He likes to just splash in the bathtub and just sing and sing. Isn't it wonderful!" I finished up as enthusiastically as I could.

"Sure," Jerry said. "My grand-

father," he added, "makes a hobby of taking school kids out on hikes. You know."

"Sure," I said. I decided then and there I'd rather let Walter drown than send Jerry in there to get him out of the tub.

Just then the screen door slammed and Mama said, "Yoo-hoo! Annabelle! Is your young man with you?"

"Yes!" I called, hissing on the s. Mama's phraseology is always so irritating. I wasn't at all sure Jerry wanted to be referred to as "my young man."

"Be right down!" I added. "Jerry," I said, "you just put your things in there and come on down when you're ready."

What I wanted was a moment alone with Mama and I got it.

"Someone has got to do something about Walter," I whispered. "He's there in the bath tub again and singing and you *know* he's dr..."

"Don't you dare," Mama cried, "say that. Your grandfather Mayberry is perfectly all right and he'll get out of the tub when he's ready."

"Mama, at a time like this you cannot close your eyes to ugly reality. You know Walter can't get out of the tub by himself and none of the men are here and pretty soon he'll start yelling and then Jerry will have to go hoist him out. Call up cousin Jefferson. *Please!*"

"Now, dear," Mama began soothingly, "I haven't written you about it, but Walter has had the most amazing..."

There was a hoarse screech and Jerry came barrelling down the steps with his cuff ruffles untaped and one boot off.

He grabbed Mama with one hand and me with the other. "Get out of the house!" he cried. "We'll lock it in and get it when the rest of the men get back."

Mama removed his hand firmly.

"Your grandfather Mayberry," she

told me, "is out of the bath."

"There is an alligator up there!" Jerry cried, still trying to herd us out.

"Is *this* your young man?" Mama asked in a tone which she never used with the tourist trade.

"Yes," I answered. "Mama, if Jerry sees an alligator..."

"Please make yourself at home, Mr. Price," Mama said with a severe look at his hanging cuffs. "Since we no longer have servants you'll have to excuse me while I get supper started."

We hadn't had servants for as far back as I could remember.

"Look, Annabelle," Jerry began, whispering nervously and looking like he'd gotten off on the wrong floor of a hospital. "I don't want to insult your..."

It was at that moment that I found out what the word galumphing means, because Walter came galumphing down the stairs.

In all justice to my grandfather Mayberry, he didn't really look like an alligator.

But in all justice to Jerry, I could see how a mistake might have been made.

"Hello, Annabelle," Walter said, as though he'd just seen me last this morning. "Your boyfriend's got no guts."

"And you," I said furiously, "have no manners. Walter, how *can* you come out in front of company looking like this?"

"Can't look any other way, chick," he said. "Hormones."

"I'm going to be a freshman in pre-med next year," Jerry said, "and I've never heard of a hormone with those kinds of side effects."

"Cap," Walter said, "you've got an awful lot of ignorance to lose."

"Annabelle!" It was time for me to see to the biscuits and set the table.

"Make yourself at home, Jerry," I

said, feeling sure this was not the way things were at *his* home.

The kitchen was unnaturally cool. Furthermore, it didn't smell like anything at all.

The air was clear.

"Mama!" I cried. "We've got an atomic stove!"

It was built into the side wall. The old wood stove was still there, of course, for the tourists. But the tin chimney was gone and the lids were clean and the cracked one had been replaced.

Mama smiled and pressed a button. The wall panel slid back and inside were eight dinners, neatly set on plates and plain raw.

"All I have to do," Mama said, "is press a button and the food is cooked and the plates come out just warm."

"You had a good crop of tourists?"

"No. Your grandfather Mayberry provided this for us."

"You know Walter can't even provide himself with cigars."

Mama bit at her upper lip with her lower teeth, a sign that I will never learn to be tactful. "Walter has built up quite a little business. At first we thought of it as just a hobby but now it's growing into—well, it looks as though we may find ourselves carrying on the tourist trade as a sort of hobby."

"Whatever kind of business can Walter have got into?" A horrible thought struck me. "Not Yankee wines?"

"*Dear!* It's a...um...mail order business."

"There's something you're trying not to tell me. But if you don't, Walter will. And he'll make it sound even worse than it is."

"Dear, your grandfather Mayberry is handling the distribution of Swamp Water Youth Restorative for the entire Confederacy."

"Sw...!" I simply collapsed into hysterics. It was such an absurd thing and Mama said it so primly.

"Oh, Mama!" I finally managed. "That's plain disgraceful. We didn't need an atomic stove that bad. And oh, he'll tell Jerry! I'd better go get him right now."

"It is not disgraceful. Swamp Water Youth Restorative actually does restore youth."

"Is that those hormones Walter was talking about? Is that what makes him look so peculiar?"

"I don't know that he looks peculiar. It is simply the next stage after old age. People look different at different stages. You should have seen yourself when you were one day old."

"Oh, all right. I don't know why you have to remember these things about time and bring them up all the time. Let's put it this way. Walter has changed since I was home for the Christmas holidays."

"Yes, and I just explained it. The Youth Restorative contains hormones which, as I understand it, cause changes in the basic structure of the cells of the human body. DNA or RNA or something like that. Women are not expected to understand these things, Annabelle."

"That's your excuse for things you don't want to understand. But I've seen Walter so I know this Youth Restorative does something. Where on earth did he get this stuff? Surely it isn't plain old water from the swamps."

"No. It's from—dear, didn't you all hear any rumors over at Precollege?"

"We hear all kinds of rumors."

"Well, this thing is big. It involves the whole Confederacy and there's more to it than just Walter's mail order business. Is that the men coming in?"

It was either them or a herd of elephants. Every time Brother walks in the house the chandeliers sway. And there would be Uncle Gary and...

"Set the table, Annabelle!"

I got out the good silver, because of Jerry, but not the crystal, which makes me nervous.

Everyone was a little stiff during dinner. I think this was partly due to the fact that while the rest of us had chicken and mashed potatoes, Walter had a string of raw fish. And the more everyone tried not to notice it, the more he chuckled.

I could have just *died*.

After dinner we cleared the dishes and I found out we had a dishwasher-stacker-disposal unit that even ground up the bones and sloshed the leavings in a bucket for the hogs.

Mama and I left the men to smoke in the dining room while we went out to smoke on the gallery. There's nothing sillier than this segregated after dinner smoking, particularly as this is the time when all the interesting things get said. I know, because once when I was ten I hid in the china cabinet, and boy, what I didn't hear!

The stars were flung all over the sky and just blazing away and I had to sit there through two cigarettes fending off Mama's questions about Jerry. Finally she said, "I do wish your father were alive," which meant she gave up.

"Now where did Walter get this Youth Restorative?" I asked.

"Ah, that," she said with a sigh. "You know, Annabelle, you couldn't have picked a worse time to bring a guest home. Particularly one we know almost nothing about. I've written Ada Sue in Jackson to find out what the Prices are like, but I haven't heard from her yet and Jerry's in there listening to all that talk and I'm not sure that Walter will remember to be discreet."

"If there's anything Walter's good at, it's being indiscreet. You still haven't answered my question."

Mama sighed again and got that dignified look on her face that she uses when she says things she doesn't

want people to laugh at. "The Swamp Water," she said, "comes from the planet Venus."

At that moment Jerry walked out, flipped a cigarette into the petunias, took my elbow and guided me out for a walk in the starlight.

"I'll bring her back alive."

I knew without looking that Mama smiled and then went frowning into the house.

A little down the road, near the Leaning Pine Tree, I stumbled over a rock and came out of my daze.

"Jerry," I said, "my mother is stark, raving mad. There's a plain bad streak in the family." I shuddered. Who'd be next?

Jerry laughed. "Don't you know what's happened?"

"No. And if somebody doesn't explain it to me pretty soon I'll lose what little remains of my mind."

"The Venusians have landed," Jerry said, "in a swamp around Bayou Teche. They landed, in fact, in a bayou that runs behind your great Aunt Felicie's house. You *have* a great Aunt Felicie?"

"Great aunt by marriage. Aunt Felicie is nine hundred years old and she insists on living by herself out there with the alligators. Every Christmas she comes in with a great big pot of gumbo. Otherwise, we never see her."

"Well, your great Aunt Felicie took to the Venusians and the Venusians took to your great Aunt Felicie."

"I suppose Walter told you all this and I suppose you swallowed it hook, line and sinker. But will you please explain why nobody's heard about the Venusian landing."

Jerry shrugged. "Apparently Felicie tried. She wired the president of the Confederacy. She wired her state representative. She even wired the Union government and several top Union scientists. When no one came she apologized to the Venusian representatives and wrote a letter to

Grandfather Walter."

"Did the Venusians learn English from her?"

"No. They learned Cajun from her?"

I giggled. It all sounded so exactly like Aunt Felicie.

"Do I see a nice piney bank up there?" Jerry asked, pointing to the bluff beyond the old Carey place.

"You do. Here, hold my hand and I'll take you around the back way. You can't get there from the road."

I led Jerry around the dark, crumbling house, which looked like a place where no one had lived but many had died. We crossed a queasy little bridge with stars laughing in the creek beneath.

"What did Aunt Felicie say in her letter to Walter?" I asked when I had gotten Jerry across the creek safely and on to an overgrown path that no one could have found but me.

"She said the Venusians wanted to know what sort of present the people of the Confederacy would most appreciate. And of course Walter, being badly in need of rejuvenation himself, suggested a Rejuvenator."

"The Venusians didn't know he and Aunt Felicie are both half crazy?"

"They're not so crazy. Let me finish. The Venusians thought this was a perfectly good idea, and they whipped one up."

"Really, Jerry."

"You said you wanted to hear. You're the one that wants to waste all this starlight talking."

"I mean it's hard to believe the Venusians just happened to have a recipe for human Rejuvenation with them. Particularly since I assume they're not human."

"Not human the same way we are. But they do have one useful area of scientific knowledge under control. And that's virology. The study of viruses."

"Given time," I said, "I could have figured out what virology is."

"You're not being a good listener," Jerry said. We sat down and watched the fireflies across the road, and there was something lovely and comforting about the darkness and the stars and the little surprise glowings of the lightening bugs.

"What does virology have to do with Swamp Water Youth Restorer?" I asked, dropping pebbles off the edge of the bluff.

"Just this. The Venusians had increased their own life span enormously through the use of viruses."

"I thought Walter said it was hormones."

"He does think so. But from what he says, I think it's all done with viruses. This is a guess. I gather they have a virus that goes in and replaces the template of the living cell. The template is the pattern from which new cells are formed. And if you change the template, a different cell is formed. Now maybe for themselves, they can rejuvenate without changing their appearance a great deal.

"But you can figure out what happened. Working with viruses with which they were familiar, they found one which alter cellular patterns but not to the extent of causing shock or death. But it was, after all, a Venusian virus, and the effect is—well, rather amphibious. You see how Walter looks."

"I don't know," I said, "but what I'd rather look like Aunt Felicie and die at a reasonable age than end up like Walter."

"If you think Walter minds, you're wrong."

"Oh, I know. Walter's enjoying the living soul out of all this."

"At the rate the mail order business is going, everyone may soon be just exactly like Walter."

"Jerry, I get the oddest picture of the old guard UDC sprouting tails

and swarming down en masse to Bayou Lafourche. In all humanity, somebody ought to go and warn the alligators."

Well, Jerry left in a huff the next day and at the time I thought it must have been because of something I'd done—or more likely what I'd not done—the night before.

But the next week we got a frantic telegram from Aunt Felicie. Apparently Jerry had gone North and convinced somebody about the Venusians, because Aunt Felicie's house was running over with Union scientists. Well, this would get Jerry into a good Eastern medical school.

Of course, nobody told him *not* to do this, but he should have asked us about it beforehand. It sounded like

he was selling out to the Yankees.

Even so. The Venusians are on our side, because that's where the nice, warm swamps are. Not to speak of Aunt Felicie, who has a way with people when she tries.

No doubt the Union scientists learn many useful things from the Venusians. But Walter has an exclusive franchise on the Swamp Water Youth Restorative.

And the swamps are a paradise for rich old post-senescents, which is nice for the poor old natives. Not to speak of the poor young natives.

The latest thing is, of course, top secret. But since cousin Jefferson is in the senate I know all about it and I think it's a grand idea. Watch for the Annexation of Venus.