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Cover by WOOD showing a full house beats togetherness.

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security plan

By JOSEPH FARRELL

***I had something better than
investing for the future . . .
the future investing in me!***

Illustrated by WOOD

“**M**Y mother warned me,” Marilyn said again, “to think twice before I married a child prodigy. Look for somebody good and solid, she said, like Dad — somebody who will put something away for your old age.”

I tapped a transistor, put a screwdriver across a pair of wires and watched the spark. Marilyn was just talking to pass the time. She really loves me and doesn’t

mind too much that I spend my spare time and money building a time machine. Sometimes she even believes that it might work.

She kept talking. “I’ve been thinking — we’re past thirty now and what do we have? A lease on a restaurant where nobody eats, and a time machine that doesn’t work.” She sighed. “And a drawerful of pawn tickets we’ll never be able to redeem. My silver, my camera, my typewriter . . .”

I added a growl to her sigh. "My microscope, my other equipment . . ."

"Uncle Johnson will have them for *his* old age," she said sadly. "And we'll be lucky if we have anything."

I felt a pang of resentment. Uncle Johnson! It seemed that every time I acquired something, Uncle Johnson soon came into possession of it. We'd been kids together, although he was quite a few years older, a hulking lout in the sixth grade while I was in the first, and I graduated from grammar school a term ahead of him. Of course I went on to high school and had a college degree at fifteen, being a prodigy. Johnson went to work in his uncle's pawn shop, sweeping the floor and so on, and that's when we started calling him Uncle.

This wasn't much of a job because Johnson's uncle got him to work for almost nothing by promising he would leave him the pawn shop when he died. And it didn't look as if much would come of this, because the uncle was not very old and he was always telling people a man couldn't afford to die these days, what with the prices undertakers were charging.

BEFORE I had even started to shave, I had a dozen papers published in scientific journals, all having to do with the nature of

time. Time travel became my ambition and I was sure I saw a way to build a time machine. But it took years to work out the details, and nobody seemed interested in my work, so I had to do it all myself. Somehow I stopped working long enough to get a wife, and we had to eat. So we ran this little hash house and lived in the back room, and at least we got our food wholesale.

And Johnson's uncle fell down the cellar stairs and split his skull open. So Johnson became the owner of a thriving business after giving his uncle a simple funeral, because he knew his uncle wouldn't have wanted him to waste any more money on that than he had to.

"But we have a time machine," Marilyn said fondly. "That's something Johnson would give us a lot on — if it worked."

"We *almost* have a time machine," I said, looking around at my life's work. Our kitchen was the time machine, with a great winding of wires around it to create the field I had devised. The doors had been a problem that I solved by making them into switches, so that when they were closed the coils made the complete circuit of the room.

"Almost," I repeated. "After twenty years of work, I am through except for a few small items—"

I looked at her pleadingly.



"It will run about twenty dollars. Do you think—?"

She didn't care much for the idea, but finally she slid off the wedding ring.

"You'll redeem this first thing, Ted? Before any of the rest of the stuff?"

I promised and took off at a dead run.

Johnson didn't have to inspect the ring; he'd seen it before, and he counted out twenty dollars. That was the only item he'd give me a decent price on. He knew I'd be back for it.

"How's the time machine coming along, Ted?" He had a little smirk, the way some people do when they hear I'm building a time machine. "Get in touch with Mars yet?"

"I have no interest in Mars," I told him. "I plan to make contact with the future — about thirty years from now. And for your information, the time machine is practically finished. The first test will be tonight."

He wasn't smirking now, because he never forgot the way I passed him in school and he had a good respect for my brain. He looked a little thoughtful — only a little, because that's all he was capable of.

"You get to the future, Ted, suppose you bring me a newspaper. I'll make it worth your while. I've always treated you fair

and square, Ted, now haven't I?"

I looked over his shelves. Too many of those dust-covered items were mine. And I didn't have to be a telepath to know what he was thinking.

"Maybe you'd like a paper with the stock market quotations, Uncle? From about thirty years from now, say?"

The smirk was completely gone now. "You get something like that, Ted, I'll pay you! Wouldn't help you out any, because you have nothing to invest. Me now, I could buy something that will keep me in my old age. I'd give you a — hundred bucks for something like that."

I laughed at him. A hundred dollars! Uncle always had his nerve. He was scowling when I left, still trying to figure how he could get in on the gravy, because outside of Marilyn he was the only person who ever thought I might succeed.

MARILYN cooked dinner for us while I was putting the final touches on the time machine.

"Tonight we celebrate," she said. "Steak."

It smelled wonderful, but the occasional whiff of ozone from my equipment was more exciting. I'd told Marilyn we had about an hour before I could make the test, but with my working faster than I had expected and her getting be-

hind with the meal, she was just putting the steaks on the table when I was done with the machine.

"Oh, but let's eat first, Ted!" she said.

"I couldn't eat! After so much work—" I stared in fascination at the master switch — the door. "This is it, Marilyn! What I've been working toward all these years!"

She saw the way I felt and maybe she was a little excited herself.

"Go ahead, Ted," she told me. I closed the door.

There was more ozone and a blurring in the middle of the room. We stepped away from the thickest of the blurring, where something seemed to be gathering substance.

The something, we soon saw, was a man sitting in a chair surrounded by strange apparatus, most of which I couldn't guess the purpose of. It was a very young man, when I could see him better, probably nineteen, wearing bright clothes in what I figured must be the style of 1989.

"Man-o!" he said. "This time machine is low Fahrenheit, o-daddy! Right to the bottom! It's the deepest!"

I blinked. "Parlez vous Francais?"

Marilyn said, "I think he means he likes it. But who is he and

just where did he come from?"

The gaily dressed youth got out of the chair and smiled at us. Each of his shoulders had padding the size of a football. His coat tapered from four feet wide at the shoulders to a tightly bound waist, the lapels from a foot at the top to zero. The trousers widened out to wide stiff hoops that ended six inches above his shoes. And the shoes! But at least they weren't really alive, as I had thought at first.

"How is it," asked Marilyn, "that a cool cat from the future comes to visit us in a time machine? I would expect a more scholarly type."

"Not so, doll-o. The angleheads don't reach the real science. The scientist pros believe that all knowledge is known. They delve not into the sub-zero regions of thought. That is done by us amateurs."

HE did a short bit of syncopated tap and introduced himself. "I am Solid Chuck Richards, ambassador to the past, courtesy of the Friday Night Bull Session and Experimentation Society."

"Are they all like you?" I asked.

"No, o-daddy-man. Some are deep, some are high on the scale, but all of them reach together on one thing — they all feel that the pro-scientists have grown angular

and lost the sense of wonder. So we gather together on Friday nights to work on the off-beat side of science. We read your books — if you are Ted Langer—?”

I admitted it.

He danced a rhythmic circle around me, staring in what was evidently adoration, and kept murmuring, “Reach that deep man! Ted Langer — the father of time travel! O-man-o! Deep! Real deep!”

“Now see here,” I finally broke in. “Don’t they talk English where you come from? And just how do you come to be here anyway? I built a time machine to travel into the future, and instead I get you telling me how deep I am. Are you here or am I there?”

“You are here, o-daddy-boy, and I also am here. But, to explain this, I may have to use some angle talk, which is what you mean by English. We read your books — which are collectors’ items, by the way — and we decided you were way under the zero mark, especially when we saw that the angle-heads wouldn’t touch any of your ideas. So we got together and made our time machine. But I am sad to report, doctor-o, that your theory was a bit less than two-hundred-per-cent correct. There were a few errors, which we found.”

It was something of a shock to hear this future rock-and-roller tell me thefe were mistakes in my

work, and I started to argue with him about it. But his attention wasn’t on the conversation. He was sniffing thoughtfully, the thing he’d called sense of wonder shining in his eyes. He was looking at the steaks Marilyn had set on the table.

“Reach that!” he said, awed. “Gen-you-wine solid flesh! Man-o! I haven’t seen a steak like that in all my off-beat life!”

So naturally we invited him to sit down at the table and he didn’t have to be asked more than once. It seemed that food was pretty expensive in 1991, which is the year he came from, and what there was of it mostly came from factories where they shoveled soy beans and yeast into a machine and it came out meat at the other end, if you didn’t make too much fuss about what you called meat. But with so much of the good farm land ruined by atomic dust, and so much more turned into building lots on account of the growing population, it was the best they could do.

WHEN we heard this, we pushed the second steak in front of him and he showed he was a growing boy by finishing every scrap, along with a double order of French fries and half a dozen ears of corn on the cob. But he had to give up after two pieces of pie.

He sat back in the chair, patted his stomach and looked as if he had just won the Irish sweepstakes. He looked at the big refrigerator. When Marilyn opened it to put things away, his eyes almost popped out at the sight of the meat stored there.

"Man-o!" he said. "You must be rich!"

Marilyn laughed. "No, not rich — far from it. We operate a restaurant and that's our stock you see."

"Oh, doll-o! I should not have eaten so much. What do you charge for a meal like that?"

"We would get three and a half for each order," I said, diplomatically not mentioning all his side orders, "although we don't get much carriage trade here. But don't let it worry you. Nothing's too good for a guest from the future."

"Three and a half?" He looked amazed. "Why, such a feed would bring twenty-five or thirty where I come from — if you could find it! Let me pay, o-daddy-friend, at least your price."

And he pulled out some bills. I started to push them back, for of course I wasn't going to spoil this great moment in my life by asking a traveler from the future to pay for a meal.

But then I saw what he was trying to give me.

I picked up the bills and stared. Marilyn's head was over my shoul-

der and she was staring just as hard. She took one out of my hand.

"It's not real," she said. "There's not that much money in the world."

She had the five. I had the ones. The five-thousand and the one-thousand-dollar bills, that is. I looked up at Solid Chuck Richards.

"When you said that meal would cost twenty-five or thirty, did you mean twenty-five or thirty *thousand*?"

"You reach me, man. Inflation, you know. It's terrible. I remember when a gee would keep the beat rocking in a juke palace for an hour. Now you pay half a gee a number. It's terrible."

After we explained to him that the inflation was even worse than that, he decided it was something more than terrible. It seems he hadn't paid much attention to money in his younger days, though he did recall now that when he was very small he'd been able to get a good nickel candy bar for twenty dollars, but he hadn't seen anything smaller than a hundred in some time now.

"There should be a law against this sort of thing," he said indignantly. "It's enough to turn a man into an anglehead, the way they keep pushing up the price of fumes. And what they charge for Bulgy Sanders records —"

He picked up the bills and looked at them.

"But I think maybe we can find a way to profit on this, daddy-boy! I have a deep thought—we members of the Friday Night Bull Session and Experimentation Society will come to your restaurant and pay you five gees for a steak dinner, which is a fine price for you but very little for us. In that way, we will eat good food and you will gather a good bundle of the stuff of life."

There was a thudding noise at the window. I looked over quick. Somebody was hanging on outside, off balance, as if he had been standing on a ladder outside and had fallen against the window.

I ran for the door, forgetting it was a switch. But Solid Chuck Richards realized it. He dived back into his chair and called, "Reach you later, o-daddy!" He disappeared as I pulled the door open.

The sudden flash as the time machine stopped operating reminded me about those switches on the door, but it was too late now. I ran out and around the side just in time to see a figure disappearing up the alley. Sure enough, there was a ladder against the window.

I didn't bother chasing the man very far, because, after a fast look at him, I had a pretty good idea who it was. I'd speak to him later.

MARILYN and I sat around looking at the big bills. They were the size of present-day currency, and were beautifully made, and would have passed easily except for a few things. Such as that "Series 1988" inscribed alongside the signature of Irving P. Walcourt, Secretary of the Treasury. And the Treasurer of the United States in 1988 would be Kuru Harmonoto. From the State of Hawaii, I wondered, or—?

"They're no use to us at all," said Marilyn. "Unless we hold them until 1988. I was talking about security for our old age. Do you suppose—?"

"You forget," I said, "that steak will run you twenty-five or thirty thousand in 1988. This is going to be a great disappointment to the members of the Friday Night Bull Session and Experimentation Society, but I fear we must explain to Solid Chuck Richards that we just cannot afford to do much business of this type."

I pushed aside the money and began thinking about some of the things the youth from 1991 had told me. There were holes in my theories—a lot of holes. True, I had succeeded in building a time machine, but I could never go anywhere in it. Because time travel was possible only by traveling from one time machine to another. The amateurs of 1991, knowing from my books (I must remember to

write them) that I had built a time machine in 1959, were able to make contact. Solid Chuck Richards was selected by lot from several volunteers to try the machine. I met the other members of the Society later and learned that and a number of other things from them.

The reason Solid Chuck came back instead of my going forward made solid sense. I could see it now. My time machine had never existed in 1991. His had existed in 1959, or at least its parts had. I could overcome that problem — if I had the full power of the Sun for several minutes to work with, and a way to handle it. Then I could change things so that my time machine would have existed in the future . . .

Even the verb tenses were going wrong on me.

These amateur experimenters, it seemed, were considered a bit on the crackpot side, taking such pseudo-science as mine seriously. Not knowing enough science to realize that the ideas I wrote about were impossible, as any professional scientist would have, they followed them through. They tried to get in touch with me in their time, but I wasn't available, which saved me another paradox. Suppose I had joined the Society and come back as a volunteer?

But it was encouraging to know the reason I was going to be un-

available in 1991. Marilyn and I had gone on a second honeymoon — on the first commercial passenger liner to Mars.

"And so," I told her, "you don't have to worry about security in your old age. Tickets to Mars must cost a few trillion dollars. We won't be poor."

Marilyn was still looking at the currency of the future.

"We will be," she said, "if we keep selling steak for the price of soy-bean hamburger. By the way, Ted, I wonder who that was at the window?"

The answer came to me then. I put the bills into my pocket and kissed her.

"We will not have to eat soy-bean hamburger, o-doll. And I will take you to Mars for your second honeymoon — as soon as they start passenger service. I am going out to make a down payment on the tickets right now."

UNCLE Johnson took the glass from his eye. He looked very tense, like a fisherman with a prize catch on a very thin line.

"It's good," he said, and his voice trembled a little. "I—suppose your time machine worked?"

"Surprised, are you, Uncle?"

"Yes, yes. But I see your situation, Ted. You, of course, can't afford to hold these for thirty years. Now — ah — I can. And I'll be glad to help you out by taking

them off your hands. Naturally I have to hold them a long time, so — let's say twenty dollars a thousand?"

"Let's not say that." I took the bill from his hand. "I figure fifty is a fair price. There'll be lots more, Uncle. And, as you say, I am always broke and cannot afford to put them away for my old age. But running the time machine is expensive and I can't afford to take less than fifty."

He looked as if he were going to snatch the bill right out of my hand, he was so eager.

"All right, Ted, I realize there are expenses. Thirty-five."

We compromised on forty.

"But I want a promise," he said emphatically. "I'm to be the only one you sell these bills to!"

"You reach me, o-uncle." I handed him the bills. "You're deep, man. Real deep!"

Real deep in the hole, that is— he mortgaged his house and his regular inventory to buy up all the money I began taking in. Once we redeemed the wedding ring and

all the other articles, I got to feeling mellow and even a bit grateful. He'd started me in business, so to speak. I couldn't stick him with all those millions that would just about buy him a helicab ride to the poorhouse in 1988.

So when Marilyn and I got just as deep in the black, because the Society members gave us some books on stock-market statistics, I started giving Uncle tips every now and then. Not free, of course — I asked for half and we settled on seventy-thirty. With that plus the ones I bought, both for now and the long pull, I guess we're the only people living today who can be sure of having a second honeymoon on Mars, although Solid Chuck Richards tells me he hears Mars is overrated, there not being a juke on the whole planet, and even if there were you couldn't jump to any decent kind of beat in that low gravity.

I wouldn't say so to Solid Chuck Richards, but that sounds like absolute zero to me.

— JOSEPH FARRELL