

# SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

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# THE BETTER LIFE

by CHARLES V. DeVET

Everything in the universe is subject to the force we call the will. McMahon found the secret of using will power, and it made a great, great change in his life

A blast of wind jerked at the window as Roy McMahon opened it. He slipped—and he was dead.

He still breathed; the blood of life still flowed through his veins; he still reasoned. But no power on this Earth, or out of it, could stop his hurtling fall to the sidewalk fourteen stories below.

Or at least that was McMahon's first thought. After the initial shock of dismay—the realization that he was falling to his death—a strange something happened to his mind. It acquired a lucidity and swiftness of function that amazed him. It was as though the reality within which he moved had paused and lengthened. He had often heard that a

man's life passed before him at the instant before death, and now he knew that it was true.

He thought with regret of the many things that would be left undone; he knew a swiftly passing sorrow for his many mistakes. All these he weighed and measured, and dismissed: All his past thoughts, emotions, likes and dislikes, passions and hates arrayed themselves before him—and assumed their true perspective. All had been picayune, childish. He exulted in his new wisdom. And for the first time knew true peace.

He was surprised to find that he no longer feared his approaching death. After a moment he understood why.

Nothing can frighten a man who has already given his life as lost.

He turned his attention to the phenomenon at hand. He saw then that all this introspection had taken place while his slipping fingers still grasped futilely at the window ledge. If so much inner contemplation could be achieved in so brief a span of time, he reasoned, the amount he could do before he reached the ground should be stupendous.

With renewed interest he regarded his present predicament. For a man possessed of the wisdom he had acquired, even saving his life should not be impossible. He sought for the means. The answer was waiting for him, like a friend in a warm room.

Will power!

Some philosopher—probably Schopenhauer—had said that everything is subject to the force which we call will. That too had been correct. To save his life would take great concentration—that was the secret of will power—but he knew he was capable of it.

He closed his eyes to better

orient the subtle flow of force which he felt generating within his brain. He pictured himself slowing in mid-air, bringing his body around into an upright position, and coming softly to rest on the sidewalk.

A moment passed. He felt the hard cement surface press gently against his shoe soles, and his descent stopped. He had succeeded!

McMahon's effort of concentration had been so great that when he first opened his eyes his right seemed blurred in a great gray blanket of fog, but gradually the sidewalk and the buildings beside it took shape, and finally pedestrians appeared on the walk, and automobiles in the street. None of the passers-by seemed to have noticed his fall and passed him with the usual I'm interested-in-me-only expressions.

McMahon's own emotions were a bit difficult to define. He felt as though he had wakened from a dream; glimpses of what he had experienced in his fall came and went. The celerity and cold logic of mind were gone, but he still felt,

deep within, the strength of will which he had discovered. He returned to his office and did not mention his accident to anyone. They would not have believed him, and he would have appeared ridiculous trying to convince them.

When he returned home he kept his secret to himself, for the same reason. But all through the night the new thing within seemed to throb, with a subdued purr of potential power.

**T**HE next day McMahon returned to his job at the garment factory. He held a very minor executive position there; assistant to the assistant personnel director.

Sometime during the early part of the afternoon McMahon glanced up and saw old Vic Peterson, the plant production manager, passing by the glass door of his office. It would be nice to have his job, McMahon thought idly, as he had done often in the past.

Peterson paused in his absent-minded strolling. He seemed to look about him in puzzlement. Then his face

cleared and he turned and entered McMahon's office. He smiled. "Afternoon, Mac," he said. His tone was more cordial and friendly than McMahon remembered ever hearing it.

Peterson came over and sat on the edge of McMahon's desk. "You know, Mac," he said, "I've just this minute decided to take my retirement. I've been thinking about it for several years, and now I have a chance to buy a lake place at quite a reasonable price. I'm going to do it!"

McMahon felt his eyebrows rise. He sought for words to agree that Peterson was doing the right thing, but not to appear too eager to see him go. This had taken him completely by surprise. Not so much that Peterson was retiring, but that he should be the first to hear about it. Peterson had never been particularly friendly toward him. He was quite certain that Peterson had always regarded him as merely another minor cog in the organization.

"I've always regarded you as one of our better young men," Peterson further surprised him

by continuing. "I'm going to put in a good word for you to Baudette when I tell him I'm leaving."

Peterson held up his hand to halt the sputtering thanks McMahan tried to get out. "Oh, it won't be as easy as all that," Peterson warned. "You'll have to sell yourself. Baudette is a sharp one. My advice is to think up a good sales talk. And make it really good." He clapped a friendly hand on McMahan's shoulder and left.

McMahan took Peterson's advice and concentrated on what he would say, if and when his interview with the executive vice president came up.

**B**AUDETTE called him in three days later. By that time the news of Peterson's imminent retirement had become general knowledge. The office grape vine also had it that Baudette had already interviewed several other potential production managers from among his executive force. All of them held more responsible positions than McMahan.

"I'll be frank," Baudette said between puffs, as he lit his pipe, "I wouldn't have con-

sidered you for the position if Vic hadn't been so insistent on it. I didn't know he was such a good friend of yours." He held his voice up in a half question.

"We aren't exactly friends," McMahan said. "I was surprised as you must have been when he said he was recommending me."

"Well, no matter," Baudette figuratively brushed the topic aside, "but one thing, Peterson is no fool. If he says you have the stuff there must be something more than ordinary there."

"I hope he was right." McMahan was careful not to say too much."

"Do you have any ideas?" Baudette asked suddenly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"If I made you production manager, how would you go about bettering the business?"

"This would have to have your approval, of course, and probably that of the board," McMahan began, striving for just the correct manner of confidence plus deference, "but an idea occurred to me a few days ago that might do

a great deal to promote the company's business."

Baudette nodded encouragingly. "Go on."

"The idea's quite simple. Perhaps for that reason it could be very good. We already make 'stretch' stockings that fit any foot. Why don't we make 'stretch' underwear—shirts and shorts?" As Baudette's eyes widened with some emotion he could not quite define, McMahan went on. "Using the 'stretch' material would eliminate considerable overhead. It would save much sizing and pattern work, enable us to carry a smaller inventory, and cut losses on obsolete styles. On the sales end, the retailer also could get by with a smaller inventory. And finally, we would be first on the market with the new articles—the novelty value would be great, you know."

Baudette's pipe had gone out. For a moment he stared straight ahead. "Why didn't I think of that?" he murmured. "Why didn't anybody think of it?"

THE following week McMahan was made production manager. However, by that time he was not as thrilled as he might have been earlier with the promotion. He had learned more about the power within him—and it was so great that it staggered his imagination.

He was on his way home one evening, hurrying to catch his train, with a crowd of other commuters blocking the platform ahead of him. "I wish they'd get out of my way," McMahan thought.

A path opened through the crowd and with startled disbelief McMahan walked through. Abruptly the pattern clicked into place in his mind. He could control the actions of those about him! He recalled then how Peterson had so unexpectedly decided to retire—and recommended him for the position. That had not been a coincidence.

On the way home McMahan mentally fondled the new gift he had found like a man savoring wine on his tongue before swallowing. But there was still more to come.

His wife, Elena, met him at the door. "How's your sinus?" McMahan asked, kissing her. She had been troubled with it for the last several years. It had been getting progressively worse.

"Still as bad as it was this morning," Elena answered. "This headache is killing me."

A new thought occurred to McMahan: Would it be possible, he wondered, to cure her headache? He concentrated.

"I'm glad you're home," Elena said after a minute. "I'm beginning to feel better already. I believe my headache's going away too."

"That's good," McMahan answered, keeping his exultation hidden behind his calm words. He looked at her fondly. He hadn't paid too much attention lately, but she had changed considerably since they'd been married twelve years ago. She had put on more weight than was either comfortable or attractive, and sinus drainage had formed permanent pouches under her eyes. She had lost much of her early zest for life, and while she was not unhappy, there

was little that thrilled her these days.

McMahan wondered just how great his new power was. Could his influence make her more like the happy, exciting girl he had married? He decided to try. But he would have to be subtle. No sudden, unnatural change; it would have to be done gradually, carefully.

SIX months later McMahan's wife was more beautiful than she had ever been—and more contented and happy. In addition, his company had prospered greatly under his direction. He was a successful man.

The day he took a mental inventory of himself, and his new power, he received a letter from General Motors. He knew what would be inside the envelope.

A few days before he had heard that they were looking for a new general manager; he had asked for and received an interview.

He had recommended that they make their motors in sealed units, such as was used

in refrigerators. When any automobile developed trouble the motor could be replaced—with the use of a simple crane—in ten minutes' time. The defective unit would be sent to the factory and repaired on an assembly line. Thus, for a few dollars more a manufacturer could guarantee his automobile for life. The idea would revolutionize the industry.

McMahon was certain that the envelope contained the offer of the job. Life had become a beautiful thing, he reflected. There was no limit to what

he could achieve, to the goals he could attain; no limit to the help he could give other men and women with his great power. He was just beginning to realize the scope of what he could, and would, do.

McMahon knew from then on life would be adventurous, blissful; that there was little that would prove impossible for him. He knew all this—but there was one thing he did not know.

He did not know that he was dead.

THE END

