

# UNKNOWN

JUNE • 1941

TWENTY CENTS

JUNE, '41

## FANTASY FICTION



### SHAPE OF DESIRE . . . . . Cleve Cartmill

It was—something. It was an ancient, fabled gem, it was a pair of tailor's shears. It was a gun, a great emerald, or a hacksaw blade. It was—the shape of desire!



### YESTERDAY WAS MONDAY . Theodore Sturgeon

Slight error somewhere! He got behind the scenes, and woke up Wednesday morning although Yesterday was Monday. The Builders hadn't finished making Wednesday yet—



### NOT ACCORDING TO DANTE . Malcolm Jameson

Hell wasn't what it used to be, what with all the imps on relief, and a steady rain of broken shoelaces, inoperable gadgets, and broken-down cars. But there was a very special hell for him—

### THE FOUNTAIN . . . . . Nelson S. Bond

Ponce de Leon was right—the Fountain of Youth was there in Florida. But he was wrong—for it was the fountain of death, too!

STREET & SMITH'S

# UNKNOWN

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1941

VOL. V NO. 1

The editorial contents of this magazine have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission.

## NOVEL

- THE FOUNTAIN . . . . . Nelson S. Bond . . . . . 9**  
 Ponce de Leon was right! The Fountain of Youth was in Florida  
 —but it was not quite the happy thing de Leon thought it to be.

## NOVELETTE

- NIGHTMARE ISLAND . . . . . E. Waldo Hunter . . . . . 132**  
 Only a man who'd been in his condition for a long time could have  
 understood, accepted, and acted reasonably on Nightmare Island!

## SHORT STORIES

- NOT ACCORDING TO DANTE . . . . . Malcolm Jameson . . . . . 59**  
 Even Hell should be modernized a little once in a while  
 —it makes for a more effective, more subtle result.
- THE CREST OF THE WAVE . . . . . Jane Rice . . . . . 71**  
 He rode the crest—till a Judas and a Delilah tricked him,  
 and dropped him in the river. Thereafter—he rode them!
- THE HOWLING TOWER . . . . . Fritz Leiber, Jr. . . . . 90**  
 On the vast, bleak plain there was only one  
 thing—the lone tower. And the tower—howled!
- SHAPE OF DESIRE . . . . . Cleve Cartmill . . . . . 101**  
 No man could see what it was—and yet, to every man  
 who saw it, it was whatever thing he most wanted—
- YESTERDAY WAS MONDAY . . . . . Theodore Sturgeon . . . . . 112**  
 The Actor slipped behind the scenes—to find the Scene-  
 shifters at work building Yesterday and Tomorrow!
- JOSHUA . . . . . R. Creighton Buck . . . . . 126**  
 A strange old clock, that kept, quite liter-  
 ally, marvelous time! It was never wrong.

## READERS' DEPARTMENTS

- OF THINGS BEYOND . . . . . 5**  
 Concerning Inhabitants of Mythology.
- AND HAVING WRIT— . . . . . 159**  
 The readers speak their minds.

Illustrations by: Cartier, M. Isip, R. Isip, Kramer and Schneeman

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Bi-monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Incorporated, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Allen L. Grammer, President; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President; Gerald M. Smith, Treasurer and Secretary. Copyright, 1941, in U. S. A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications, Inc. Subscriptions to Countries in Pan American Union, \$1.10 per year; elsewhere \$1.50 per year. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. Any material submitted must include return postage.

Printed in  the U. S. A.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC. • 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK

**NEXT ISSUE  
 ON SALE**  
 JUNE 27th  
**\$1 A YEAR**  
 20c per COPY

# THE FOUNTAIN

by NELSON S. BOND  
Illustrated by Edd Cartier



● There was a Fountain of Youth—and it was in Florida; so far Ponce de Leon was right. But—he didn't know the strange way in which it worked.

It didn't fool Jonathan Preston one tiny bit to see that misty haze sifting lazily from the swamp beds that lined the road; he was not beguiled by that ruddy, cheerful, lying sun, nor by the galaxy of gaudy-plumaged birds flashing

from tree to tree, fluttering and twittering and chirping angrily as the throb of a motor violated their woodland sanctuary.

It was cold. The mist was an evil, marrow-chilling fog; the sun's rays thin and feeble; those damned birds just another Chamber of Commerce prop, like the daily temperature reports on the beach and in the newspapers, like the bathing beauties and the lemonade stands and the palm trees, to make tourists believe it was warm in Florida.

Actually, it was cold. Bitter cold. Preston could feel it in his veins, in his very bones; he shrugged himself more snugly into his camel-hair coat and glared with mingled amazement and anger at Squires who, on the other side of the thick, plate-glass panel that separated the tonneau from the chauffeur's seat of the town car, slouched behind the wheel, hatless, topcoatless, uniform jacket unbuttoned, defying the damp, chill winds that ruffled his hair.

Only a fool, thought Preston irately, would venture out on a day like this. Especially with other home problems demanding immediate attention. That business about Enid and Ralph, for instance. If they thought for a moment he didn't know what they had up their sleeves— And Robertson, with his glib talk of a merger! And that quack doctor, Foster—

"Bah!" said Jonathan Preston.

Squires peered into the rear vision glass; his lips sought the speaking tube. "I beg pardon, sir?"

"Nothing!" growled Preston. "Keep going!" He added sharply, "And slow down! Watch the road! Are you trying to kill us both?"

For an instant he had glimpsed his own reflection in the mirror; the sight was a frightening one; it reminded him of a never-absent fear. The fear of death. The face he saw was seamy and lined; his hair was a frosty smudge. Jonathan Preston frowned and looked away swiftly. He dreaded age; he hated being old. Only a fool, he thought; a fool or—a man with a purpose.

But he had a purpose. Recollection of it came back to him now, suddenly, and he thrust a thin, blue-veined hand into his coat pocket, drew forth a scrap of paper. His lips moved as he read its legend for the hundredth time.

*"Wher stinking Fennes a skulle-shoop Tor surrond,  
Wher Treen are alwey yonges, and Beestes kenne feres,  
This Playce let him all Men bewair, wher's fond  
Th' Espayniard's curséd Font that sheddes Men's yeers."*

THE SLOW PULSE surged, unsteadily in Preston's veins as once again he read a hopeful message into the awkward Old English phraseology. This was his purpose—to somewhere in these stinking Florida marshes find a skull-shaped hill, and a spot avoided by animals wherein the trees were always young and green, and a fountain of water—

For Jonathan Preston knew, or thought he knew, what this fountain was. The "Font that sheddes Men's yeers"; the precious well of life which an ancient Spaniard sought vainly, and seeking, died. Juan Ponce de Leon's long-lost Fountain of Youth!

It was a fantastic thought, yes. But no more fantastic than that this key

or threat or warning, this scrap of paper he now clutched, should have survived the centuries in the pages of an old volume recently picked up at a used-book stall. It was no more fantastic, thought Preston defiantly, than the legend of El Dorado, which modern search had proven to be based on fact, than the elder tales of alchemic transmutation, now validated by twentieth century cyclotrons, or than a thousand other newfangled ideas for the preservation of youth: vitamin capsules, gland treatments, sulphur compounds.

He held in his hands, believed Jonathan Preston, an indubitable guide to the location of the one spa at which he might lave himself of a fear which, each passing day, hovered more darkly about him. The fear of encroaching age and age's dour companion, Death.

Therefore, he dared the bleak and miserable day, the long ride through interminable wastes; therefore, he strained his eyes for sight of that skull-shaped hill, half hoping to see it, half fearing to hope—

And suddenly, rounding a curve—it was there!

Not a high hill, for there are no high hills in low Florida. A rounded rise, sharp-limbed against the sky. Its shape was that of a skull, fleshless, with shallow pockmarks for eye sockets, a noseless, slack-jawed thing. But the sight of it wakened a swift, hot gleam in Preston's eyes. Because at its base nestled a patch of vivid, green, *young* trees!

Excitedly, Preston hunched forward and rapped horny knuckles on the pane. "Squires! Stop here!" he said. When the car ground to a standstill, he was already fumbling with the door handle. Squires let him out. Despite his preoccupation, Preston noticed that the chauffeur's brow was beaded with perspiration, and this was a most amazing thing, for as he stepped from the car the wind that greeted him was chill.

But now was no time to worry about trifles. Beyond the road lay the swamp, beyond the swamp the tor, beyond the tor—what? Preston was afire with anxiety. Over the swamp hovered a sultry, brooding silence, but to Preston it seemed that a myriad of wraiths peopled these lonely depths. *Young* figures, all of them. Gay, laughing cavaliers in gaudy silk and bright-plumed bonnets; copper-skinned braves; lean-jawed buccaneers; scouts, lithe in buckskin trappings; *quistadors*, breasted and helmed in gleaming silver.

These beckoned him to the hidden Fountain, welcomed him to fellowship in their company of eternal youth. A cold wind blew, and Jonathan Preston pulled his coat more tightly about him. "Wait here!" he ordered.

Squires stared at him incredulously.

"But, Mr. Preston, sir!" he said. "The damp—"

"Wait here!" repeated Preston pettishly. "Don't go away. I'll be back directly."

He stepped from the road into the swamp, and toward the distant patch of green—

HE DID NOT at first see the other man. He saw only murky swamp waters and the fading of golden sunlight as tree boughs, joining above him,

filtered the rays to a wan ocher. He saw the black, rich soil and the profuse wealth of living things squandered on this wasteland by a lavish nature. The live oak and citrus, the cucumber, pawpaw and custard apple, the wild rubber, the multi-hued and delicate orchids, everywhere the razor-edged sedge thrusting its fronds up from the mossy slime. He saw the gray mourning veils of Spanish moss that hung like faded banners of defeat, and felt the wet mud suck at his plodding feet.

Then he felt the mud give way to more solid ground, and the swamp was gone; with it had vanished the gray moss and the ancient oaks, and he moved through a copse that was all cypress. All sapling growth! He noticed with a swift excitement. All young trees!

Then the sky brightened before him, and he was past the trees, standing in a tiny, circular glade. The "skulle-shoop" hill was on his right, and before him—

The Fountain!

There was no doubt in Jonathan Preston's mind that he had found the spot he sought. For never elsewhere had he looked upon a fountain just like this. Surrounded by a pool of emerald green, rising from a mossy hillock fresh and new, its frail plume wavered and spiraled and played in the restless breeze like a live thing; now dancing, now twisting—ever tossing its mist of molten silver into the pool beneath with the abandon of a wastrel king.

With a choked cry, Preston surged forward. He felt no coldness now, no slow paralysis of years; there was an urge within him to plunge his hands, his arms, his face, into these green-flaming waters, to hurl himself into the pool bodily, opening his lips and pores to its life-giving savor.

But the silence livened only by the tinkle of falling drops was broken now by a ruder sound, the sound of a moving body. Jonathan Preston looked up. It was then that he saw the other man.

THE STRANGER was standing on the other side of the fountain. Who or what he was, Jonathan Preston could not rightly say; certainly he had no business in such an out-of-the-way spot as this, for he appeared to be a tradesman or a peddler of some sort. Slung over one shoulder he carried a round wheel; Preston recognized it as the kind of grindstone which, in his youth, itinerant scissors grinders had been in the custom of bearing. Over the other shoulder was slung a leather bag, and in his left hand he held—though his hand concealed it, and Preston could not be quite sure—something that looked very much like—of all things!—an old-fashioned hourglass.

These things Preston noticed only subconsciously. Consciously, he was suffused with a petulant anger that anyone should be here at this moment to share his hour of triumph. He spoke, and his voice was harsh.

"Who," he demanded, "are you? And what are you doing here?"

The stranger pushed a battered old fedora back from his eyes and studied Preston calmly. He stroked his cropped beard with a calloused hand, and his beard was, Preston noted with some disgust, stained and untidy.

"I might," he said, "ask the same thing of you, Mr. Preston."

Jonathan Preston started. "How—" he began, then paused. If the man knew who he was, it was obvious that he was from, or around, Miami. Everyone there—even the white trash—knew the wealthy Prestons. And he was in no mood to bandy words with a swamper. A poacher, most likely.

"Well, get along with you!" he said roughly. "This is no place for you. Get on about your business!"

"Why," said the scissors grinder, "I *am* minding my business." And he pawed his untidy beard reflectively. "By any chance, Jonathan Preston," he said, "would you be thinking of taking a little dip in *that*?" He nodded at the pool, and Preston felt a flush staining his cheeks.

"I might," he said stiffly, "or I might not. But I don't see where that concerns you one way or another. So if you'll move along, my good man—"

"I wouldn't if I were you," said the stranger earnestly. "You see—it wouldn't do any good. It would merely complicate matters."

Preston glared at him wrathfully.

"What? I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Oh, yes, you do! We understand each other perfectly, Jonathan Preston. But, you see, it's this way. Nothing will really help. Your story is already written in the book of time. The beginning and the end. Three score and ten is your allotted span, and not even the Fountain can help *that*! Of course, it may *alter* things a bit. But I'm not so sure you'd take a dip if you understood the situation.

"Now, look, Jonathan Preston," he continued gently, "why don't you give up this nonsense and go home? You'll be better off in the long run; I guarantee you that. How about it? I don't like to see you make a mistake."

"For the last time," said Preston, "will you go?"

"Well," shrugged the scissors grinder, "if that's the way you feel about it. I'm sorry. But, look, Jonathan Preston—you didn't find this place all by yourself. If I go away and leave you alone, will you do me a little favor? Will you give me the clue that led you here?"

"Anything," snarled Preston, "to get rid of you!" The dancing laughter of the Fountain had roused an echoing tumult within him; he was aflame with the desire to be alone by this wondrous pool. "Anything!" He hurled the scrap of paper at the other man. "And now—" he said.

But he was speaking to himself. The scissors grinder had kept his bargain. He was gone. But Preston wasted no time in pondering his departure. The chill had fled from his bones; the air was soft and warm on his naked flesh as he prepared himself for the pool—

How LONG he lingered in that well of lambent green, he could not afterward say. Hours, perhaps. Surely hours—for when he finally returned to the road, a dozen cigarette stubs and a crumpled, empty pack littered the roadway beside the driver's seat, and Squires was dozing.

But Preston was not in the least tired. His dip in the Fountain had re-

freshed him enormously; he felt gratefully alive in every fiber and muscle. Warm, too! He carried his topcoat over his arm, wondering why he had ever worn it on a sultry day like this.

He felt good, better than usual, but he felt a pang of disappointment, too. Completely unreasonable disappointment, he tried to tell himself. After all, legends of magic fountains, Eternal Youth, were so much poppycock. Yet, in an innermost chamber of his heart he had nurtured a credence in this ancient tale. The hope had budded when he actually saw the skull-shaped hill and evergreen grove, had flowered when he looked upon that strange, woodland pool.

But meeting a stranger—and an insolent mendicant, at that!—had taken some of the edge off his enthusiasm. And when he had stepped from the emerald waters to study his body carefully, painstakingly, heart-poundingly, to find its flesh still creased and old, his veins no less swollen, his hair no less scant and silvered, hope had died, and Jonathan Preston realized his quest had been only a mad example of an old man's folly.

Yet—and he shrugged—the afternoon had been good for him. The Fountain might not be magic, but its water was tonic. He stepped forward and tapped Squires' shoulder, and the chauffeur woke with a start.

"Oh! Sorry, sir! I didn't mean to—"

"That's all right, Squires. We'll go home now."

Squires turned the car. With him had awakened his curiosity. As he drove, he kept peeking at his employer in the rear-vision mirror. The miles sped by; the tires hummed a soggy reel on the road. Finally he could restrain himself no longer.

"You were gone quite a while, sir."

"Yes," said Preston. "I suppose I was."

A moment's silence, then, "I trust you enjoyed your little stroll, sir?" It amused Preston to ignore the implied query.

"Why, yes, Squires, I did. Thank you, Squires."

"Not at all, sir. I . . . I hope you didn't overexert yourself, sir."

Preston smiled. "Not a bit, thanks. I feel fine."

"Yes, sir," said Squires politely. "You're looking well, sir." Again he glanced at his employer in the mirror. There came a faint look of surprise into his eyes, a greater tone of surprise to his voice. "You are looking *well*, sir! *Very well!*"

"Why, thank you, Squires," said Preston, gratified. "I feel—" And stopped suddenly. He had glimpsed, in the glass panel, that which had elicited rare surprise from the usually emotionless Squires. His own reflection. The sight was—startling.

His cheeks seemed somehow rounder, more bright with color. In his eyes was such a sparkle as they had not known for years. And it seemed to Jonathan Preston that his hair was less gray than he remembered it as being!

He was not just looking "well." He was looking—*younger!*



IT WAS SATURDAY, and as usual, Enid was entertaining week-end guests. A cocktail party was in loud progress when Preston got home. The house, the grounds, the swimming pool, were noisy with people he neither knew nor wanted to meet.

He entered through a side door, hoping to escape to his private apartment without being seen. He might have succeeded, too, had not an over-ripe blonde in an underripe swimsuit, playfully evading the pursuit of a broker old enough—but not sober enough—to know better, bumped into him as he slipped through a darkened hallway.

She screamed, and the commotion brought a throng of curious people, including Enid herself. Enid's normal reaction to any situation was to burst into an immediate and meaningless torrent of words. She reacted normally.

"Why, Lana, darling, whatever is the matter, sweet? What is all the fuss about? Did you hurt yourself? Someone get her a drink. Poor child, her neryes—"

"She's all right," snapped Preston, "and she didn't hurt herself—she knocked the wind out of me! And don't get her a drink; she's had too many already. Young lady, please stop making those noises! You're splitting my eardrums!"

Enid said, "Oh, it's you!" starkly, and for a split second the tight lines settling about her lips and eyes told her real feelings toward her father-in-law. Then she gained possession of herself. Preston found her effusive affection more sickening than her concealed dislike. "Why, Lana, dear—it's just Popsy! You must be frightened, honey child! He didn't mean to scare you, did you, Po—"

"For Heaven's sake," exploded Preston, "don't call me Popsy!" He glared. "That child should be whipped and put to bed," he said grimly, "with an ice pack on her head! Now, if you'll all excuse me—"

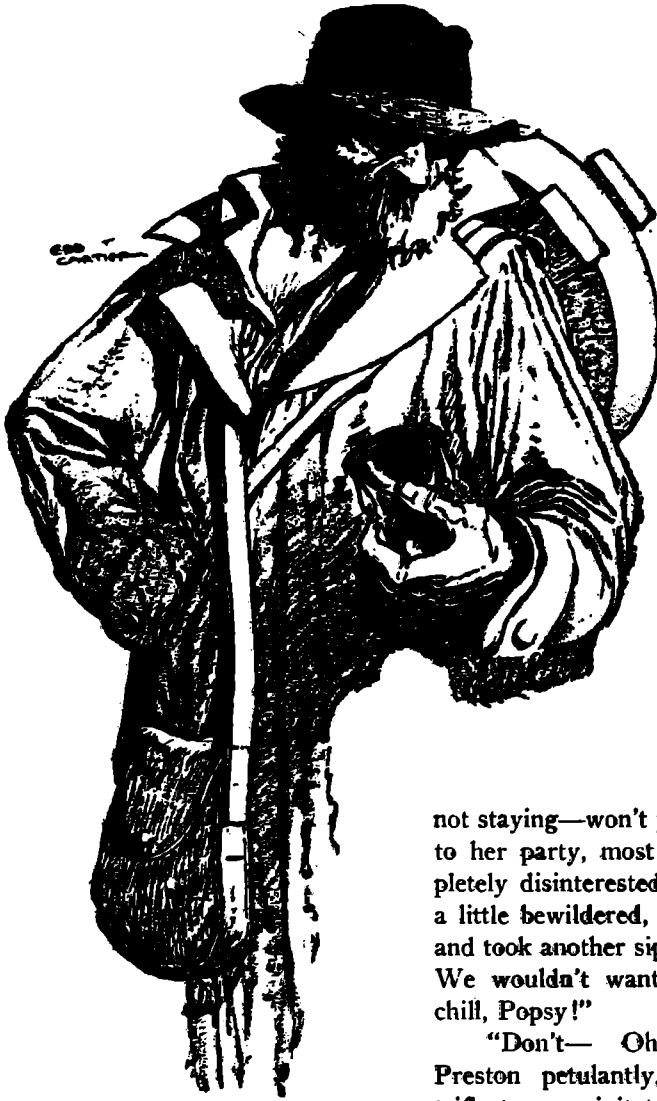
He started to elbow his way through the glassy-eyed group that had gathered. He wanted to be alone in his rooms with his mirror. While he hardly dared admit it to himself, Squires' comment and that brief glimpse of his strangely altered features in the glass had reawakened a hope within him that his earlier fancy might yet prove fact. That the green pool might—might barely possibly—have been the legendary one he had sought.

But Enid, performing magnificently before her house guests, refused to let him go without loosing a full barrage of daughterly affection. She clung to him, pursing her lips in the *petit moue* which Preston so detested.

"Now, Popsy! You mustn't run off. You haven't met all these nice people. Come out into the patio, where it's nice and shady. We'll have—Why, Popsy!" Chiding reproof in her little cry. "Your shoes are all damp and muddy!"

"I like 'em that way!" growled Preston. "And don't call me Popsy, damn it!"

"You run right upstairs," insisted Enid, "and put on dry shoes. Right away, now! Before you catch your death of cold. They'll forgive you for



not staying—won't you?" This last to her party, most of whom, completely disinterested and more than a little bewildered, nodded owlishly and took another sip. "Now hurry! We wouldn't want you to take a chill, Popsy!"

"Don't— Oh, hell!" blurted Preston petulantly, and fled. A trifle too precipitately, perhaps, because he found himself winded at the second landing. He paused to rest for a moment. Thus, quite by acci-

dent, he gained a vantage point for the anticlimax to the little playlet just enacted below.

THE GROUP dispersed, and as the last guest went back to the portable bar, Jonathan Preston's son, Ralph, appeared. Ralph was plump, pale and puffy; his bloodshot eyes were supported by dusky, veined lumps of flesh. He walked with a revelatory deliberation.

"Whuzzup?" he demanded muzzily. "Whazzall the noise about? Who came in? The old man?"

There was no sugariness in Enid's voice now.

"Who else? Your delightful father, breaking up one of my parties again. He never fails!"

Ralph gestured precarious apology with his highball. "Skip it! Old boy doesn't mean any harm. Have a drink!"

"I won't have a drink! I won't have anything. I'm sick and tired of this! Ralph, you've got to do something! We simply can't go on this way, with that doddering old wreck snooping around my house, frightening my guests, sticking his nose into everything, simply simply *haunting* the house like a ghost too stubborn to die!"

Ralph said cautiously, "Now, wait a minute! Mustn't get excited. What would we do without him? Can't just kick him out, y' know. He's the moneybags around here."

"*You* know what to do! I've told you a hundred times. Speak to your lawyer; have the old man's financial interests transferred to your care. *Any* court will give you a judgment. Why, he's sixty-nine years old; seventy, week after next! And getting crustier and crabbier and more annoying every single day!"

Jonathan Preston stifled a snort of outrage, also a desire to inform Enid that he was listening. He awaited his son's reply. Ralph's voice was worried.

"Don't talk nonsense, Enid! The courts won't strip him of his powers just because he's old and crochety. Don't forget, the old man's still pretty keen. He'll fight us—"

"We won't get a commitment on those grounds. There are other more convincing proofs that his mind is weakening. Did you see what happened this afternoon? He came home with his feet soaking with mud! He must have been out walking in the glades. No sane man would do that. And besides—"

Enid's tone was suddenly shrill with triumph. "And *another* thing—did you see what he did to Lana? Caught her in the dark hallway and tried to *kiss* her! The poor girl was terrified!"

Ralph said thoughtfully, "He did that, eh?"

"Did it? Why, I have a dozen witnesses—"

"Sure, I know. But how about Lana? Will she swear to it in court? That he tried to kiss her, I mean?"

Jonathan Preston could not see his daughter-in-law, but in his mind's eye he could see the smug, satisfied smile on her lips.

"But, *darling!* Lana? Why, she and I are just like sisters."

There was grudging agreement, now, in Ralph's tone. "Well, maybe you're right. Perhaps he would be better off in some institution with men his own age for company. I'll speak to Rodgers tomorrow. No—today's Saturday, isn't it? Monday, then."

"You will? Grand, darling! Now perhaps we should join our guests. They'll be wondering where—"

A door slammed, and their voices faded away. Jonathan Preston, his face heavy with anger and disgust, stalked to his apartment. He had suspected that something like this was in the wind for some time. Now he knew. So Ralph would get in touch with Rodgers on Monday, eh? Well, Monday would be twenty-four hours too late, as Ralph and Enid would learn to their sorrow. Not without reason had Jonathan Preston at one stage of his Wall Street career been known as Lightning Preston. His legal representatives were paid fatly to dance attendance at an instant's notice. His wire would bring one flying from Manhattan. Meanwhile, a pen, ink, foolscap, and a brace of servants to witness his signature would stop this nonsense! Preston fumed. If he were a younger man—

The thought reminded him of his mission. A younger man! And what—he thought dizzily—and what if he were?

With suddenly quickened stride he hastened to his rooms.

FIFTEEN MINUTES later he sat on the counterpane of his bed, staring dazedly before him, weakened not so much by overexertion as by the stupendous discovery he had made.

There was no longer any doubt about it! The mirror in the auto had not lied, nor had the several mirrors in his apartment, from one to another of which, in those first panic-stricken moments of awareness, he had darted frantically.

There was no doubt about it. He—Jonathan Preston—had found the true, the veritable Fountain of Youth! And he was getting younger!

Oh, he was no beardless stripling, callowly abustle with eagerness; neither was he the firm-bodied Preston he had been in middle life. He was still an old man, as the world reckons age; he was still lean-shanked and gray, blue-veined and rounded of shoulder. But there were changes. He was, he thought, much as he had been—oh, say a year or so ago! At the time that a "*PIC*" photographer had done a full-page tale on his daily activities. "Retired Tycoon Basks 'Neath Southern Sun—"

Yes, that was it! It was as though he had sloughed a year off his true age. Jonathan Preston remembered, of a sudden, that it had been just about a year ago his eyes had started to bother him. Had begun blurring images, throwing a veil about faraway objects. But now—that haze was quite gone. He sat numbly on the edge of his bed and read without difficulty the tiny numerals on his desk calendar. *March 3, 1941*. Yet yesterday, on March 2, 1941, he could not have read those figures without hunching over them.

Some one tiny cell within his brain keened over and over again, "But it can't be! It is too incredible! Men do not grow younger!" But this tiny message faded into insignificance before the stronger evidence of his eyes. Logic be damned; it *was* so!

"And how far," thought Preston, "will it continue?" He studied the

glass intently, as though by watching sharply he might see the marks of age dissipating. But he could see no further change.

Perhaps the powers of the pool were limited. Maybe the regaining of his lost vigor required that he bathe regularly in its emerald waters, each time sloughing off another modicum of his age? He laughed happily. Well, why not? He had a clue to the Fountain's location. "*Wher stinkinge—*"

What in blazes was that doggerel, anyway? He could not remember offhand. But he had the scrap of parchment; or no! He had given it to someone. Who? Oh, what difference? He could find the place again; would do so tomorrow. Or the next day.

Meanwhile, there was something he should do. About a telephone call to someone. It, too, was vague in his memory. Everything was beclouded by the wonder that had overcome him.

Deliberately he cast aside all bothersome thoughts. Like an elder Narcissus, he lingered before his mirror, wondering at the change he saw, not daring yet to share his awe with anyone else.

Later, dinner was served to him in his room. Still later he bathed and prepared himself for bed. He slept well.

HE WOKE the next morning ravenously hungry. It was an unfamiliar sensation, this feeling of gaunt hollowness in the belly. For a moment fear seized him; this emptiness was another symptom of the creeping age he dreaded. He had not, for a number of years, had a good appetite. His diet was an old man's diet of milk toast and eggs, cereal beverages, and light gruels.

Then suddenly he recognized the pangs for what they were, and recollection of yesterday's astonishing adventures flooded back on him. He sprang from his bed nimbly, noting as he did so that his clock gave the hour as 10:30. That, too, was surprising. Age had made Jonathan Preston a light sleeper. Not since his retirement from business had he lingered so long abed.

He sought the full-length mirror of his closet door. What he saw reflected therein brought a gasp of amazement to his lips. The potency of the Fountain had not failed. This Preston who stared back at him from the glass, gasping, was a younger man than the Preston who had gone to bed last night. He was a Preston who could not possibly be a day over sixty-five!

A great exultation welled up within Preston, but he did not have time to savor this moment as he desired. A rap sounded on his bedroom door, and Lorrimer entered, bearing a breakfast tray. It was one of the unplumbed mysteries of the household how Lorrimer always divined the exact time of each member's rising, and appeared instantly with steaming food.

He moved directly to Preston's bedside table.

"Good morning, sir. You slept well, sir?"

"Very well, thanks." Preston moved to the butler's side, eyed disdainfully the single, melancholy poached egg that stared back at him with un-

winking reproach, sniffed the weak, watery coffee substitute. "Ugh!" he said.

"I . . . I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I said," repeated Preston firmly, "'ugh'! You can march that pap right back to the kitchen, Lorrimer. Bring me some decent food. Real coffee—pancakes—sausage—"

"P-pancakes!" said the startled Lorrimer. "S-sausage, sir? But your diet—" For the first time within the recollection of man, Lorrimer's aplomb was shaken. He gazed at his employer blankly. Then his brain accepted the testimony of his eyes, and his jaw dropped.

"Well, what are you staring at?" demanded Jonathan Preston testily. "Pancakes, I said. And country sausage—plenty of it! Get along!"

"Y-yes, sir!" said Lorrimer bleakly. He whisked up the tray and scurried to the door. Preston halted him there.

"A moment, Lorrimer. My appearance seems to have surprised you. No doubt you think I look younger?"

Lorrimer said cautiously, "You look very fit, sir."

"There's no need to say anything about it to anyone downstairs," said Preston. "I've been taking a series of . . . er . . . health treatments recently. This can be our secret for a little while. The others will find it out soon enough."

"Yes, sir. Very well, sir," said Lorrimer, and was gone. When he returned with the heartier breakfast Jonathan Preston had demanded he was once again the impassive butler who had served the Prestons for a decade. Neither by deed, word, nor expression did he show any signs of ever having seen anything out of the ordinary.

JONATHAN PRESTON, however, was finding a great many things out of the ordinary. His bewilderment began when, as he ate, he read his morning newspaper. The name of the paper was known to him, the format familiar; he found no startling changes in the stock market report to which, from old habit, he first turned.

But the news! The headlines on Page 1 were utterly incomprehensible!

Preston stared at the bold-face type, completely at sea. "RAF Blasts Cologne!" read one. "Churchill Hints Nazi Blitz Stalled!" claimed another, and "FDR Repledges American All-out Aid to Britain," a third.

"Raf?" muttered Preston. "What in thunderation is a raf? And why should it blast Cologne?" What, too, he wondered, was a "Nazi blitz"? And why was Churchill blowing off his face? Which Churchill, by the way? Old Winnie? But he was practically in retirement. The Conservative member from Epping, playing no active part in the good, sound "business-as-usual" Baldwin government.

He read the columns avidly, but such information as he gleaned left him even more confounded. When he paused at last, shaken, his forehead was damp with perspiration.

Something was frightfully wrong! Either the entire world was mad—or *he* was! This paper spoke glibly, and as if all its readers would understand, of a war in Europe! It was Great Britain against the "mighty armed forces" of that comic-strip jackanapes in Berlin—Hitler! And that was, of course, ridiculous. Everyone knew the French army was the world's greatest military machine. Yet these articles spoke of "occupied France"—and of a Graeco-Roman struggle in Albania—and of Australian troops in *Libya*!

Preston stared suspiciously at the date line of the paper. Had he somehow lost track of time? Was this a crazy April Fool's Day joke? Newspapers sometimes issued prankish sheets on April 1st.

But no! As he had thought, it was March 4, 1941. And this news purported to be *true*!

A sudden dizziness assailed him, and a brain-chilling fear. The whole world could not be mistaken. It was he who was at odds with mankind, and with mankind's history. A period of time had elapsed of which he was completely ignorant. It was insanity! Insanity, or—

AMNESIA! He grasped at the straw gratefully. Yes, that was it! That *must* be it. Amnesia. He had suffered a loss of memory—for how long he could not tell—and awakened in a strange, new world. But his body was sound, more strong and healthy than for many months, and his brain still retained its vigor, for he could remember a lifetime of experiences. His schooldays—his young manhood—the smile on Beth's face as he stepped forward to take her hand at the altar.

Their first child, Walter, and his bursting parental pride at the clutch of the baby's tiny fist about his finger. Then Ralph's coming. Then long years of struggle in a highly competitive world. The first tiny successes—the greater ones that followed. His progress gathering momentum as he took unto himself assurance. The frame dwelling supplanted by a brown-stone mansion on Park Avenue. Work and play and scheming. Grover Cleveland—Teddy Roosevelt—the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill. The corner on wheat that made him a millionaire. Years of business success and prosperity. Happy years.

And then—the shadow of an ancient pain hovered in his eyes—less joyous years. Beth's midnight operation, and the numb, lost ache in his heart as he realized she was gone forever. The World War—and its aftermath. His quarrel with Walter, and his command that Walter's name never again be spoken in his presence. Ralph's marriage to Enid. Then his retirement from business. The home in Miami—

And then—what?

It was at this point that a darkness descended over intervening years. His last clear recollection was of a day in 1936. After that—nothing. Until this morning, when he awoke feeling much the same, looking much the same, as on that fateful day when forgetfulness claimed him.

Or—wait a minute! There *was* something else. Dim recollection of

going somewhere—meeting someone—doing something unusual. Green, and a woodland dell—of course! The Fountain!

Then the full implication of what had happened burst upon him. The Fountain's miraculous rejuvenescence was not yet at an end. As he slept, more years had been sloughed from him. He was now the Jonathan Preston he had been back in 1936. A man of approximately sixty-five years of age!

Excitedly he rose and studied himself in the glass. He scarcely knew he spoke aloud.

"It's true, then!" he said. "It's true. The magic still runs in my veins. I will be young again, and strong!"

Once again Lorrimer's polite rap interrupted him. The butler ignored, with polite acquiescence, his employer's changed appearance.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Mrs. Preston says good morning, and will you join them on the terrace, sir."

Preston nodded. "Tell my daughter—" he began.

Then he stopped. No—he would not see them immediately. He would wait until this period of slow change ended; then he would confront them with the full, triumphant evidence of his rejuvenation.

"Tell Mrs. Preston," he said, "that I am sorry, but I prefer to remain in my apartment today. Tell her—oh, anything. Tell her I have a slight cold, Lorrimer."

"Very good, sir." Lorrimer withdrew. And Jonathan Preston returned to the mirror that held him like a magnet.

There remained with him throughout the day a creeping, insistent thought that there was something he had meant to do and had not done. It was not until after he had sought his bed at eleven, however, that he suddenly remembered what it was.

His lawyers! He had intended to wire them, bring a legal representative down from New York. Ralph. Enid. He yawned. Drowsiness overcame him and he slept.

HE WAKENED in an unfamiliar room. A strangely vivid sun lighted walls and furnishings completely new to him. He lay there blinking stupidly for a moment, vainly attempting to orient himself. Then he rose and walked to the window. And looked incredulously upon a garden riotous with rich, tropical blossoms. Coconut and palm—flaming hibiscus—the soft, waxen petals of magnolia.

Why—why this was Florida!—he thought confusedly. But what on earth was he doing here? He had business obligations to meet in New York. Conferences to attend. Boards to sit on. And how had he—

A movement at the door of his bedroom startled him, spun him about. He was relieved to find his visitor only the butler, Lorrimer. Lorrimer had been with him for just a few months, but he was a good man. Perhaps he could explain?



"Lorrimer—" he said.

"Good morning, sir," said Lorrimer. "Yes, sir?" A bland mask overlay the butler's features, but his hands were not altogether steady on the tray. There were, Lorrimer was thinking, limits. Yesterday's experience had been unnerving; this morning's was even more so. It was, thought the butler, most disconcerting to look upon a Jonathan Preston who was the exact image of the man for whom you had gone to work ten years ago! "Yes, sir?" he repeated uncertainly.

"Where are we?" demanded Preston. "This is Florida, isn't it? How did we get here?"

Lorrimer stared at him blankly.

"But we've *been* here, sir, for almost seven years!"

"Seven—" It was Preston's turn to look stunned. "You say we've lived here for seven years?"

"Yes, sir. Ever since your retirement, sir." Lorrimer uncovered the tray nervously. He felt a most unseemly desire to do his duty and get away. "I took the liberty of ordering you a more . . . er . . . substantial breakfast this morning, sir. Bacon and omelette. Very tasty, sir."

"Bacon and omelette! Are you crazy, Lorrimer? You know perfectly well I'm under medical orders to avoid greasy foods! Take that bacon away! And where are my tablets?"

"Y-your—" Lorrimer's voice squeaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Your *tablets*, sir? But . . . but you haven't found it necessary to take tablets for years!"

Preston sat down suddenly on the edge of the bed.

"I haven't, Lorrimer?"

"No, sir."

"And this is Florida? We've lived here for almost seven years?"

"Seven years come April, sir."

"That will do, Lorrimer. You may go," said Preston faintly. The butler said, "Thank you, sir," and slipped away hurriedly. Preston placed his hands to his temples, rocked his head gently. It didn't make sense. Unless—

Understanding burst upon him. Of course! That was it! Amnesia. Loss of memory! For ten years he must have been living under a cloud of forgetfulness, from which, this morning, he had suddenly emerged.

Ten years of his life a total blank! Preston groaned. Then he was ten years older than at the time this tragedy had befallen him. Ten years farther along the pathway of age he detested; ten years nearer the death he feared!

He moved to his mirror, fearful of what he might see there. But the image reflected was that of a lean but well-conditioned man in his late fifties or early sixties. Gray of temple, but still bright of eye, keen of sense. In other words—he had not changed a particle! He was exactly as he remembered himself being!

A host of questions flooded his brain. If he was in Florida, where were

Enid and Ralph? What had happened to his business affairs? What of that deal in Consolidated he had been planning in 1931? And had the market ever recovered? Or had the whole financial world gone smash, as everyone feared?

He ate his breakfast hastily, so eager to dress and get out, learn something about this new world in which he had awakened, that he forgot to worry about his stomach ulcers—which, apparently, the passage of time had cured. He found suits in a dressing closet. The coats had three buttons, and they looked silly.

HE had just finished dressing when someone knocked on his door. At his invitation, Lorrimer entered dubiously.

"A . . . a Dr. Ormerod to examine you, sir."

"Aah!" said Preston. Then he *did* still have those ulcers, eh? Amnesia or no amnesia. He glared at Lorrimer. "Well, send him in!" he said.

Dr. Ormerod was brusque and noncommittal and coolly efficient. He parried Preston's queries with evasive grunts and went about the task assigned to him with evidence of neither approval nor distaste. He poked and peered and fiddled; he took Preston's temperature and timed his pulse.

"All this," said Preston, "for ulcers?"

Ormerod said, "M-mp!" He wrapped a clammy something around Preston's arm and measured his blood pressure; he made Preston jog across the room and back; he tapped the old man's knees with a rubber-tipped mallet; he punctured the tip of Preston's thumb and took a blood smear.

Preston said indignantly, "Times have changed! This is rank nonsense. A little bismuth subcarbonate—"

Ormerod stood up. He said, "I don't know anything about your ulcers, Mr. Preston. I was sent here to examine your general physical condition. It will probably please you to learn that, considering your advanced years, you are in perfect shape."

"Well!" said Preston, gratified.

Ormerod unbent. The shadow of a smile touched his lips. "As a medical man it makes me happy to see such physical condition. As a native Floridian, I take pride in the good health our beautiful Sunshine State has endowed on you. Cases like yours almost make one believe in the ancient legend of the Fountain of Youth."

The words were like a charm. Suddenly it was as if a mantle had been lifted from some clouded chamber of Preston's mind. He started, the events of yesterday and of the day before yesterday suddenly returning to him in vivid completeness. His reply was spontaneous.

"The Fountain! Why, yes—that's it, of course! I *did* bathe in the Fountain. That's why—"

"Eh?" Ormerod looked startled.

"I found it. An old verse told me where it was. I bathed in it last Saturday. And I've been growing younger ever since." Having started,

now, the words flowed eagerly. "I'm going to be young again, doctor! Young again. No fear of age nor death! Just think, a whole new life before me—"

Ormerod snapped shut the little book in which he had been writing. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. He said, "You aren't joking, Mr. Preston? You mean you really believe this . . . about the Fountain of Youth?"

"But of course! Look at me. Isn't my physical condition proof that I'm telling the truth? Two days ago I was an old man, just two weeks short of seventy. Today I'm the same Jonathan Preston I was ten years ago. Hale and hearty, strong. Except," added Preston, "for these damned ulcers."

"I see," said Ormerod. "I see." He picked up his bag. "Well, good day, Mr. Preston. I'll give a report to your son."

"Wait!" said Preston. "You mean Ralph? Is he—"

BUT the doctor was gone. Preston stood looking after him uncertainly for a moment, mind tumultuous with half-formed thoughts. It was as though he possessed a dual mind, one half of which recalled the days of his years up to 1931, the other half of which held a dimmed, hazy recollection of the past two days only.

This shorter second memory was evanescent, hard to grasp, harder to retain. Only by an effort could he hold his thoughts upon it. But he made that effort now. And making it, suddenly he realized who Dr. Ormerod was—and why he had come!

He was the physician employed by Ralph's barristers! The man on



whose testimony Jonathan Preston might be stripped of all his legal rights. And to this man Preston had babbled a fantastic tale of a magic fountain—

Preston sprang to the door. Up the stairwell there drifted the sound of conferring voices; two masculine voices, one feminine. Ormerod was speaking.

“—physique and stamina of a fifty-nine-year-old man, Mr. Preston. Any doctor would be forced to admire your father's superb physical condition—”

Enid's interruption, sharp, incisive.

“But surely there must be *some* grounds on which our case can be built, doctor. A man of that age *must* have some physical disability—”

“Not physical, Mrs. Preston. But mental! There is absolutely no doubt but that your father is suffering a late, and perhaps dangerous form of paranoia. He is prey to one of the most remarkable delusions it has ever been my experience to encounter. The belief that—but never mind! I need not upset you by describing its nature.

“However, I shall turn in my report immediately. I think I may assure you that your claim will be sustained.”

Ralph said hesitantly, “And . . . and my father?”

“I shall send an ambulance for him immediately upon my return to the hospital. I consider it most essential that he be placed instantly under benevolent supervision,” Ormerod said. “And now, if you will excuse me—”

Preston heard no more. The voices faded away as his son accompanied the physician to the door.

FIVE minutes later Jonathan Preston roused himself from the dazed torpor into which the overheard conversation had stunned him. Five full minutes he had wasted in bootless self-pity. Now, suddenly, a flash of the old Lightning in him showed forth; he rose determinedly with the conviction that he must *do* something, and do it *now!*

Looking back, he realized that it had been stupid of him to confide his secret to the stranger physician. It did sound like a fantastic story. But he, Preston, knew it was true. And if this reaction continued for another day or so, converting him—as he hoped—to a strong, stalwart man of middle age, he would be able to confront his would-be usurpers and any court, physician, or corps of physicians they chose to summon, with demonstrative proof that he was, indeed, a rejuvenated son of the fabulous font.

But—an ambulance was coming for him immediately! He could not linger here. Once incarcerated in an asylum, his task would become a thousandfold more difficult. So he must remain at liberty until such time as he was ready to appear before them. Furthermore, he must have his freedom in order to communicate with his own lawyers—

He did not burden himself with bothersome luggage. He gathered up all the money he could find in his apartment and tore a handful of blank checks from his checkbook. A glance at his clock told him it was almost

noon, another at his mirror heartened him for his flight. Then, fearing lest he meet Enid or Ralph, he slipped down the back stairway and out through the kitchen.

No one saw him. He fled across the grounds like a marauder on his own premises, and within a few minutes was boarding a bus for downtown Miami.

FOR ALL he recognized the city in which he found himself, he might have been a visitor from an alien planet. It was not so much the City of Miami itself—that he had not expected to remember, having never laid eyes upon it until his sixty-second year. And Preston had realized by now that the curious bifurcation of his memories was due to the fact that as his body was rejuvenated, so, correspondingly, were his memories returned down the pathway of time to that point which corresponded with his apparent age.

In other words, at every stage of his backward progress, his mind became *exactly* that mind which he had possessed at the age he returned to. Perhaps the very convolutions of his brain were ironed out; about that he was not sure. There was, though, he knew, only one minor difference between his mind here, at this moment, as he strode through downtown Miami, and the mind he had possessed when he was a mature man in the year 1930. Superimposed upon his basic memories was a recollection, ever increasingly dim and hard to retain, of those events which had actually transpired since his dip in the magical Fountain.

Thus the world in which he found himself was quite new to him, and strange. Fantastic were the buildings, with their black, glistening façades; there had been nothing like that in his knowledge of architecture. More fantastic still were the automobiles that scudded past him on the street like thick, purring beetles. The automobiles of Preston's memory were disk-wheeled boxes, recognizably divided into tonneau, hood and undercarriage.

These newer vehicles were all of one piece, all of one glissading form; many of them had no running boards, and the wheels were fat-tired little things concealed beneath huge, dripping fenders.

There were other changes. An ubiquitous new material called "plastic"—unfamiliar magazines on the corner newsstands—as dusk fell over the city, harsh illumination from glaring, twisted tubes of glass; crimson, green, blue, gold.

He knew, of course, that it was too late to contact his representatives in New York tonight. Nor did he see any particular need for doing so. There was time and aplenty for that. Just now he was enjoying the experience of seeing the world of 1941 through the eyes of a visitor from 1930.

He had dinner at seven in the evening; a light dinner, ordered with careful avoidance of greasy foods. He had been right about the ulcers; tiny, gnawing fangs of discomfort had bothered him all afternoon. Preston sincerely hoped that when the Fountain's magic ceased, it would be at some period wherein his bodily condition was perfect; he pledged himself that he would,

in the future, take every precaution to avoid any painful illness to which he had in the past been prey.

And that night he engaged rooms in one of the older, quieter hotels. He used a fictitious name in registering, since he felt positive that before morning Enid and Ralph, alarmed by his absence, would set up a hue and cry. He read his evening paper long before turning out the light. It was no newspaper to him; it was an elaborate tissue of fancy he could admit, but never quite conceive. A Sino-Japanese war—peacetime conscription in the United States—Franklin D. Roosevelt president for the *third* time—the Cincinnati Reds holders of the baseball World's Championship—

A mad, mad world, thought Preston. Then weariness overcame him. He slept.

WHEN he wakened, his hand stretched automatically to the head of his bed. When it found no button there, he sat bolt upright, unable to comprehend the room in which he found himself.

This surely was not his home! No sound-proofed walls to bar the din of Manhattan traffic, no servant to answer his signal, no stock ticker conveniently located beside his bed.

Blazes! Had he been drunk last night? He couldn't risk such escapades as that. With the market going hog-wild, fortunes being made by those who bought heavily and wisely, money dirt-cheap and credit unlimited. He had work to do!

But his head felt all right. And the blanket at the foot of his bed bore the interwoven legend, Fountain House.

Fountain House! The name roused a spark in the slower, less certain portion of his brain. And instantly it was clear to him that this morning was but a repetition of yesterday morning, and of the morning before that. Again, while he slept, years of his lost youth had been regained. He was now—he paused to search the knowledge of his "other mind"—he was J. R. Preston. The year was 1926. He was fifty-five years of age.

And he had much to do!

He rose swiftly, phoned room service for his breakfast, showered and dressed before it was brought to him. The fragrance of steaming coffee put an edge to his appetite. He attacked the food with relish.

With relish, too, he read the headlines and saw that his premonition of the night before had been verified. Pushing secondary war *communiqués* completely off Page 1 was a screamer concerning himself. "AGED TYCOON MISSING FROM MIAMI MANSE!" Then, in smaller type, "Jonathan Preston Disappears; Son Posts \$1,000 Reward Offer; Retired Financier Feared Victim of Mental Collapse."

"Mental collapse!" sniffed Preston. That was some of Enid's work. Clever, though. Femininely, devilishly neat bit of business. Taking advantage of his disappearance to establish the question of his sanity. "Well, we'll

soon see about *that!*" snorted Preston. He reached for the telephone. "Long distance," he said. Then, "New York, operator—"

HIS LEGAL representatives were overjoyed to get his call. They had heard of his disappearance. Was he feeling . . . er . . . perfectly well? Where was he? What was this all about? Was there anything they could do—

"There most certainly is!" snapped Lightning Preston. "For one thing, you can stop blithering like an old-maid schoolteacher, Fotheringham! This call's costing me money. I want you to hop a plane and be down here in jig time. Ask for me at the desk of the Fountain House, under the name of James Smith."

Oh, yes, sir! They'd send a man down right away.

"You'll send no one, blast you! Come yourself! And, by the way—" Preston was overlooking no loopholes from now on. "By the way—that confounded son of mine may attempt to tie up my finances in some way or other. Keep him from doing so. Stall him. Get an injunction, or a stay, or a writ of hoopy-coopy or something. But stop him, understand?"

Fotheringham understood, and would leave for Florida immediately.

Preston said, "Good!" and hung up.

It was almost eleven o'clock. Fotheringham would have missed the daily New York-Miami now; he could not very well get here until late tonight or perhaps not until tomorrow.

And tomorrow morning might bring Preston another of those temporary fogs of forgetfulness, such as had disturbed him for the past three days. But he had a plan to counteract *that*. He sat down at his desk, cudgelled his brain, and began writing.

He wrote down everything he could recollect of his experiences during the past three days. Some of it was already more than a little dim in his memory. He knew he had been served by a butler in his own home in Miami, but could not, for the life of him, remember what this butler's name was, nor what he looked like. Only by strenuous effort could he recall the location of his Miami "home." A curious anomaly, he thought. He had lived in that home for seven years. Yet this body he now inhabited had never set foot within it, and there was no recollection of it in this body's younger brain.

But by the dint of much effort, he forced his *other* brain—his three-day-old brain—to relieve his recent experiences. Thus he prepared a diary of the events dating from his ride into the Everglades up to the present moment. He prided himself on remembering such small details as the name of the squawking young woman whom, according to Enid's lie, he had "tried to kiss." Lana. And he remembered the name of the restaurant in which he had eaten last night. And there was something about a stranger—a peddler—a scissors grinder—whom he had met at the pool. The scoundrel had threatened him with—what? The exact nature of his threat escaped Preston.

When this task had been completed, he collected the closely written sheets and pinned them securely to the head of his bed where they would meet his eye

tomorrow morning. He then set himself to the task of devising how best to cope with Ralph and Enid. Rage at their perfidy was the one violent emotion of his renescent existence. Preston was firmly resolved that, come what might, from this moment henceforward, neither of them should ever profit one penny from his wealth.

When Fotheringham came, he would alter his will. He was not quite sure whom he would make his beneficiary. Both his sons now came under the shadow of his displeasure. Ralph, because of his recent treachery; Walter, because of marrying that cheap stenographer in defiance of his father's wishes.

How long ago, thought Preston, had that been? Five—no, almost eight years ago. In '18. Right after Walter's return from France. The "shorter half" of Preston's memory cried correction, and Preston smiled grimly as he realized the interlude had taken place almost twenty-two actual years ago. Where, he wondered briefly, was Walter now? Still out in Cincinnati? Had he a family now? Was he doing well?

Well—what matter? Jonathan Preston's fifty-five-year-old brain still harbored an unbending grudge against his elder son. There was

one solution. Should anything happen to him, his money would go to charity. Or perhaps to the foundation of a great, permanent sanitarium beside the magic Fountain! Marvelous thought! A spa, a refuge of health for all aging





humanity. A mecca for the old to which, journeying, they might bring their years and exchange them for new ones!

Not that Preston expected anything to happen to him. Judging by these past few days, he would soon have regained the youthful health and vigor he had mourned. He would have another life before him. After that, another dip in the Fountain, and again Youth! Perhaps, thought Preston dizzily, he was immortal! Only by accident—

But it was for the possible accident that he must provide. He had found a way to defy Death, but if anything *should* happen to him, those he despised must not profit by his death.

He had sat long in speculation. He rose, now, and left his room. With time to waste, he wished again to taste the enjoyment he had experienced yesterday; that of seeing a new world through the old world's eyes. The clerk was not at the desk when he left his room key. He went out into the streets.

THE THING that amused him most was that he walked, unnoticed, the white Miami thoroughfares, while his picture blazoned the front pages of newspapers at every corner stand. Ralph, he noticed with grim enjoyment, had raised the ante. There was now a \$5,000 reward posted for information leading to the recovery of the missing Jonathan Preston. Preston's photograph was four columns wide across the top of Page 1; newsboys were hawking his name like a litany. But there was little similarity, thought Preston, between that newspaper halftone and the face he saw mirrored in shop windows.

Thus, unnoticed, he spent the late afternoon strolling the business district of this stranger city, reveling in the scents, the sights and sounds of it.

He dined at a quiet restaurant, experiencing a pleasant surprise to learn that wine lists were offered along with the menu. There was, then, no Prohibition in 1941. He had a bottle of excellent white burgundy with his fowl, Chablis '29-Sichel et Fils, and even as he savored its dryness, could not help but marvel at the fact that this wine was warming a body three years its junior.

His greatest thrill, however, came later that night, when he visited a motion-picture house. He was stunned, momentarily, to hear the voices of the actors apparently emanating from their vividly colored images on the screen; then he remembered that both of these devices had been tested experimentally at the period of his last "true" memory. There had even been some talk of an "all-speech" picture in the process of making—a thing called "The Singing Fool," starring a chap named Jolson.

Preston wondered, vaguely, if that picture had ever been finished; if so, had it been successful? Then he stopped trying to rationalize, and surrendered himself to the enjoyment of tonight's film. He especially liked the antics of a character named Donald Duck.

By eleven, he was tired. There was an outside possibility that Fotheringham might have chartered a special airplane, too. So he hurried back to his hotel, questioned the night clerk at the desk.

"Has a Mr. Fotheringham of New York come in?"

The clerk leafed his records languidly, shook his head. "No, sir."

"I feared not. Very well—let me have the key to my room, please?"

The clerk stared at him. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The key," repeated Preston, "to my room. 803."

"Eight-oh—" The clerk's lips tightened, his eyes narrowed suspiciously. He said in a cautious voice, "Your name, sir. I'm afraid—"

"Pres—" began Preston; then stopped. "Why, James Smith, of course! Come, come, my dear fellow, what's ailing you? What's all this about?"

The clerk's eyes were definitely hard and suspicious now. He made a slight gesture with his hand, and Preston saw a lounging, derby-hatted figure stir from a foyer chair and slouch toward the desk.

"That's exactly what *I'd* like to know," sneered the clerk. "James Smith, eh? Well, it so happens I checked Mr. Smith in last night, and he's a *much* older man than you are. I never saw *you* before in my life!"

Then another voice rumbled over Preston's shoulder.

"O. K., wise guy!" said the house detective. "Will you scram peaceable, or shall I call the cops?"

IT WAS that night, when despite fatigue, Jonathan R. Preston hunched late over the desk of the new hotel to which he retreated, frenziedly scratching a new diary for the morrow's advisement, that he first began to feel the cold shadow of fear upon him.

It was not so much that he had lost his hotel room, and the portion of his money which he had cached there in the desk drawer. He could still contrive to meet Fotheringham in the lobby of the Fountain House, and he had blank checks.

His fear was twofold. First, that should this happen to him again he would not be able to write a "diary" for himself—tonight he found his task ten times as difficult as it had been this morning—and second, that if this sloughing of age continued, he would not be able to convince anyone that he was Jonathan Preston!

There was a third fear, an increasingly stronger and more logical fear, that he did not even dare frame mentally. It was too utterly terrifying. He thrust this thought from his brain, forced himself to bed and to sleep.

His wakening the next morning was again a moment of agonizing uncertainty—but this time he took a grasp on normality quickly with the help of the mnemonic aid on his bedpost.

A glance at his watch told him it was nine o'clock. A glance at the bathroom mirror told him his veins still ran with the magic of the Fountain. His face—somehow tauntingly familiar to him, only slightly gray of temple, firm-fleshed and ruddy—was that of a hale, well-exercised fifty-year-old man!

Fotheringham!

Preston went immediately to the Fountain House. Happily, neither the

night clerk nor the house detective was on duty. His query brought a negative reply; Mr. Fotheringham had not yet come in.

Preston went to the Coffee Shoppe of the hotel, ate his breakfast in reckless haste. The waitress brought him a morning paper, but he could not even interest himself in the headlines concerning himself; he let it lie unopened.

His return to the lobby was perfectly timed. Just as he entered the side door, Fotheringham came in the front, squirreling his head from side to side anxiously, searching for—Preston supposed—him. He hurried forward.

"Fotheringham!" he cried.

The little lawyer smiled falteringly, and heaved a sigh of relief. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Preston. I was afraid *he* might see me first." He added, "You're looking exceptionally well, sir. The Florida climate—"

"Never mind that! We have more important matters to attend to." Preston literally dragged him to a concealed conversation niche. "You got my telephone call? Did you do what I told you to?"

Fotheringham nodded. "Yes, Mr. Preston. It's all taken care of. It's strange that you should call just five minutes after *he* did—"

"He? Who?"

"Why, your father, of course. I told you when you spoke to me on the phone—"

THE IMPACT of the words struck Jonathan Preston like the crush of a massive fist. For a moment, all was confusion. Then, suddenly, he realized what was in Fotheringham's mind.

The lawyer thought *he* was Ralph Preston! That was why his face in the glass had been doubly familiar to him this morning. He not only looked as he himself had looked in 1921; he also looked like a healthier, less dissipated image of his younger son!

And apparently Fotheringham, in whom he had placed implicit trust, was no worthier of that trust than was this son. He wore the guilty air of a conspirator, and even now he was again craning about to make sure Jonathan Preston was not in sight.

Not meaninglessly, however, had Jonathan Preston been called "Lightning" by his business associates. He took the blow to the heart, but didn't crack under it. His quick brain sought a way to turn this startling denouement to his advantage.

"Yes," he said swiftly. "Yes, of course. I forgot for a moment. I've been so upset about this whole, unhappy affair. But tell me—what did you do?"

"Just what you suggested, sir. Got a court order restraining your father from incurring any new obligations, establishing new contracts or disturbing old ones without your consent. His securities are tied up completely. Also his bank capital. The only persons who have not yet been placed under legal restraint are his investment brokers. I couldn't withdraw his powers there without your signature as power-of-attorney. I've prepared the document—"

Preston waved it away.

"Forget it!" he ordered. "Tear it up!"

Fotheringham stared at him confusedly. "But if he should take a whim to dabble in the market, sir, he could run through all his financial resources despite our other efforts. He—"

"I know that!" thought Jonathan Preston grimly. "I know that very well, you damned, double-dealing blackguard!" But aloud, he said, "I'm sure we can ignore that angle. Too much red tape to bother with. And with my father's present mental state what it is—" He paused significantly. Fotheringham looked ghoulishly eager.

"Is it—" He licked his lips. "Is he—*bad*?"

Preston nodded gravely.

"Awful! He thinks—do you know what he thinks?"

"No."

"He thinks," intoned Preston solemnly, "he's found the Fountain of Youth!"

FOTHERINGHAM gasped, scandalized.

"Gracious! And to think that for years his brain was so keen!"

"Was!" thought Preston. "Was," you hypocritical old witch? It's still keen. Wait and see!

But aloud he said, in what he thought was a good imitation of Ralph's, unctuous voice, "Yes, we're all terribly grieved about it. Well, Mr. Fotheringham, I'm sorry to have caused you all this trouble. Had I known yesterday what I know now, I would have advised you to stay right there in New York—"

"New York?"

"Why, yes. You see, the police have picked up his trail. They've learned that he took the New York train yesterday afternoon. Apparently he has some idea of visiting you. I think it would be wisest, therefore, if you returned immediately. If he comes to your office, call Bellevue—"

"But I just got here!" wailed Fotheringham.

"I know. It's really too bad. But you *do* want to co-operate, don't you? Or—" Preston put an edge on his voice. "Or don't you? Perhaps you'd rather I retained some other firm to—"

"Oh, nothing of the sort, Mr. Preston!" Fotheringham babbled hastily. "Of course. I'll be delighted to do anything you think best. And we wouldn't think of having you go elsewhere. Our firm has served your father faithfully and well for more than thirty years—"

"Faithfully and well!" thought Preston. Liar! Humbug! Benedict Arnold in modern dress! But he said, "That's settled, then. You take the first train back to New York and wait. Don't attempt to communicate with me; I'm having our home telephone watched day and night. If anything comes up, I'll give you a call. Good-by, Fotheringham!"

"G-good-by," repeated the lawyer miserably. He had a vague feeling that

he was being shoved around. But there was nothing he could do about it. Now that old Jonathan was roaming the streets with the delusion he had discovered the Fountain of Youth, Ralph Preston was in the driver's seat. "Good-by!" he said. He started toward the door, remembered something, and turned. "Oh, by the way—did you know your brother was on his way to Miami?"

For a moment Preston was caught off guard. "What?" he said. "Brother? I have no—oh!" He was alert again. "You mean Walter?"

"Yes. He saw the newspaper accounts of your father's disappearance, phoned me in New York. . . . I gave him your Miami address."

The wolves, thought Preston grimly, were descending now. Walter was moving in for his share of the spoils, too. He said, with more meaning than Fotheringham could ever hope to grasp, "Well, I'll take care of him when he comes. Now I must go, Fotheringham. Good-by!"

The lawyer trudged away. Preston let him disappear, then started to cross the foyer. He had taken barely a step when the entrance of another figure caused him to duck behind a convenient potted palm. As the figure paused, looked about querulously, then moved to the desk for information, Preston sidled swiftly out the side door. As he hurried down the street, he chuckled at the confusion he had caused both conspirators. The man who had arrived a few minutes too late was his son Ralph.

THE CASHING of his last twenty-dollar bill at noon reminded him that he must get some money. The problem of doing so, though, stumped him for a little while. He had lots of blank checks, but he could not just walk into a bank and present a check bearing his own signature and payable to himself. Nor could he cash a check made out to "Bearer" without being known to someone at the bank—

Fotheringham's error gave him the answer. If the lawyer had thought he was Ralph Preston, so, too, might the teller at Ralph's bank. A check bearing Preston's signature would pass unchallenged, likewise, since Preston had for years supplied his son with funds.

The only risk was that of actually meeting Ralph at the bank. That, however, was a mild one, and one that must be taken. He hoped Ralph's bank was the one on which these checks were drawn. At any rate, that was the bank he went to, and apparently his guess had been correct, for as he entered, the uniformed doorman nodded politely and said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Preston. Any news of your father yet?"

Preston shook his head and moved to the counter. He wrote a check for five hundred—not an unreasonable sum, and one sufficient to tide him over until this period of change should come to an end—then presented it to the teller.

The clerk glanced at the check, then up at its passer. Then the quick suspicion in his eyes faded. He said, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Preston?"

"Of course it's me!" snapped Preston. "Please don't keep me waiting. I'm in quite a rush."

The teller nodded sympathetically. "I know you must be, sir. I've been reading about your father. Too bad. He was a fine old man. I always said—"

"Look," said Preston, "I have no time to waste. May I have the money? Tens and twenties will do."

The teller said, "I know, Mr. Preston. And I'm sure we can fix this up in a few seconds if you'll just wait till I call Mr. Flint. Your credit is absolutely unlimited here, of course, but as a mere matter of form—"

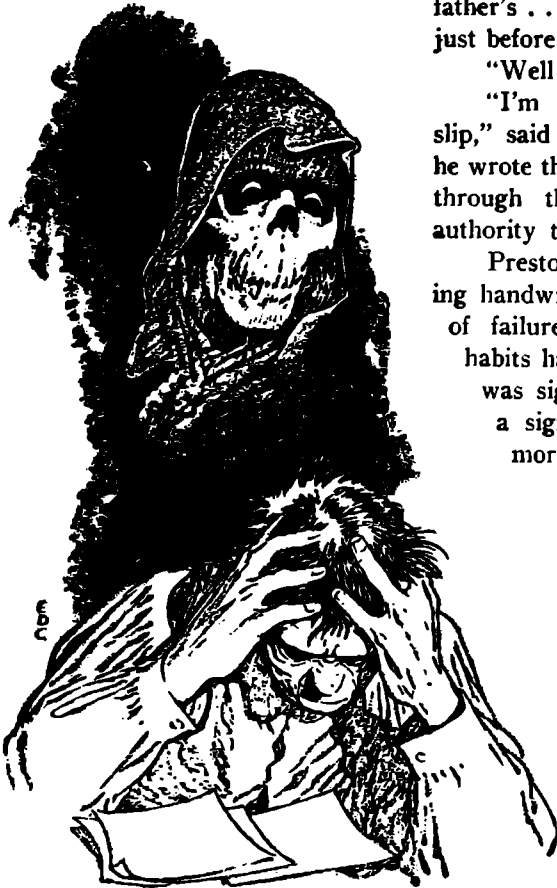
"Wait a minute!" said Preston. Lansing Flint was the last man on earth he wanted to meet face to face. Flint was his son's closest crony, a golfing-drinking-nightclubbing associate; if anyone could pierce his masquerade, Flint was the man. "Mere matter of poppycock! Is there something the matter with that check?"

The teller said soothingly, "If you'll forgive my mentioning it, sir, wasn't there something in the paper about your father's . . . er . . . mind being affected just before his disappearance?"

"Well?" demanded Preston.

"I'm afraid it was beginning to slip," said the clerk regretfully, "when he wrote this check." He tossed it back through the wicket. "We have no authority to honor this signature, sir."

Preston gazed at the loose, scrawling handwriting with a sickening sense of failure. Again his fifty-year-old habits had betrayed him. The check was signed, "J. Robert Preston"—a signature he had not used for more than twenty years—



THE REST of the afternoon comprised the least happy day Jonathan Preston had known since his renaissance started. Somehow he beat an exit from the bank before the teller summoned Lansing Flint. He went to the reading room of the Y, there wasted several hours and a dozen sheets

of paper trying to recall the signature that meant the difference between hunger and solvency.

Try as he might, he could not seem to get it. His reflexes were trained to the scrawl that spelled "J. Robert Preston"; they could not smoothly create "Jonathan R. Preston" as some instinct told him it should appear. And he could not take a chance on being arrested on a forgery charge. To be apprehended at this stage of the game would be to give up, forever, all chance of defeating Ralph's aims.

For that matter, he could not go back to that bank again. By this time, some word may have leaked to Ralph of his "visit" there. And Jonathan Preston's "short-term" mind knew of no other bank used by his son.

For the first time in his either existence, Preston went into a sort of funk. He left the Y and wandered through darkening streets, thinking furiously, viciously, but getting nowhere because his every thought was surfeited with a sense of overwhelming odds.

So intense was his preoccupation that he did not even notice the red light, nor hear the cry of warning from the sidewalk, nor the raucous klaxon of the suddenly braking van. His first intimation of anything amiss was the clutch of a hand on his shoulder—a toppling over backward. Then suddenly he realized that his ears were deafened with the scream of grinding brakes, the squeal of tormented rubber on asphalt. A shaken truck driver was leaning down from his cab, swearing jerkily at him through ashen lips. "Ya wanna git *killed*, mister? Good goddlemitey, ya *bline*? Cancha see the lights, mister?"

It had all happened so quickly that Jonathan Preston could not, now, know fright. He felt ashamed of himself for having thus disturbed the poise of a fellow man; he said to the van driver, "I'm sorry. It was my fault. I'll be more careful." Then, as the truck groaned away, he turned to the one who had saved him. "Thank you," he said. "Thanks ever so much. I didn't even notice—"

"Why, that's all right, Jonathan Preston," said the other man. "That's perfectly all right. Don't give me credit. I just did what I had to."

Preston peered at this man who, in a city where none recognized him, called him by name. In the gathering dusk the stranger's face was dim, but there was something vaguely familiar about him. Somewhere he had seen a man in a battered old fedora—a man with a stained, untidy beard, carrying over one shoulder an old-fashioned grindstone, and in one hand a—

"I know you!" said Preston suddenly. "You're the man I met at the Fountain!"

"That's right," said the scissors grinder. "I see you *did* take that dip after all, Jonathan Preston. You look remarkably well. I hope you're feeling well?"

"I'm feeling fine," said Preston. "Never better in my life. You threatened me that day, didn't you? I'm pretty sure you did, but I can't exactly remember."

The scissors grinder clucked reproachfully. They were walking down the street together. He said, "Why, now, I wouldn't put it that way, Jonathan Preston. Warned, perhaps. But not 'threatened.' You see, I knew it would do no good. And I didn't want to see you make a mistake."

Preston laughed. It felt good, because it was his first laugh in hours. He said, "Well, that's where you made your mistake, friend. It *did* do me good. You'll find out. Everyone will see—pretty soon."

"Maybe," replied the stranger cautiously. They had come to a street corner. He stopped, and Preston with him. "Maybe so. I hope everything's going to be all right, Jonathan Preston. I like to be friends with everyone, you know. And I don't want to be hard on you."

"You talk," said Preston fussily, "nonsense! What do you mean—hard on me? I don't understand—"

"But I've got to go now," said the mendicant. "I have a lot of errands to run, a lot of work to do before tomorrow morning. But, look, Jonathan Preston—and remember this. If ever you regret your little dip, remember what I tell you now. 'All things end in the beginning.' Have you got that, now? I'll feel much better about it—"

Preston demanded irately, "Are you crazy? What do you mean? Why, damn you, fellow, you don't *know* what that Fountain did for me! It made me sound again. I'm going to be young again, and strong—"

But once again he was talking to himself, for his companion had vanished. There was only one small house on the lane up which he had strode, and he could not have gone in there because Preston, facing the door, had not seen it either open or close. Besides, the only lighted room in the house was one upstairs, a bedroom. And, as Preston watched, someone within drew down the blind very gently. He thought there came from within the house the sound of quiet sobbing.

He felt better, though, for having talked with someone. He ate and went to his new hotel. He had retained his key this time, and got in without difficulty. He carefully brought his "diary" up to date, pinned it to his bedpost, and went to sleep.

WHEN he woke the next morning, the first thing his eyes lighted upon was the newspaper placed under his bedroom door with the compliments of the hotel management. He got a not inconsiderable shock when he read the headlines: "ITALIANS LOOSE COUNTEROFFENSIVE AGAINST BRITISH!"

But that was impossible! The British and Italians were allies. Only yesterday he had delivered an address to the Brokers' Club on the necessity for unlimited credit to the impecunious Italian government, so hard-pressed by the Kaiser's Austrian partners-in-crime!

Then he saw the other headline, the one devoted to himself, and his "short memory" functioned. He rose, moved to the mirror, knowing what he would



see, for his rejuvenated brain had already advised him that it was the year of 1916, and that he was a trifle over forty-four years of age.

He gained complete command of himself by rereading, as he breakfasted, his diary. He supplemented this knowledge with a careful perusal of the newspaper story. Ralph Preston was becoming increasingly anxious about his father. He had again raised the reward offer. His wife, "one of Miami's most charming social leaders," to quote the newspaper, was prostrated with grief and apprehension—

At this point, Preston sniffed quite loudly. If Enid were prostrated, he knew the reason why. Because his disappearance would delay her getting her hands on his money for a long time—seven years, wasn't it?—until the courts could declare him legally dead.

A small, boxed item caught his eye.

"—meanwhile, Walter Preston of Cincinnati, Ohio, his wife and two children, took up residence in one of the local hotels. 'Though my father and I have been estranged for many years,' Mr. Preston told a reporter, 'I feel I should be here to help in any way possible. Since my brother does not seem to welcome my offer of assistance, I will conduct private inquiry. Any information will be greatly appreciated.'

"Ralph Preston, explaining his refusal to admit his brother to the palatial Preston mansion, said simply, 'I but try to carry out my poor father's wishes. More than twenty years ago he forbade Walter to ever again set foot within his home.'"

Preston stared at the item incredulously. What was that "Estranged"? Walter forbidden the Preston home? But Walter was his first-born, his favorite son! When had they quarreled? And for what reason?

This was some further proof of Ralph's skulduggery. Or, no, it couldn't be that, since Walter himself admitted to being at odds with his father. Preston stopped to puzzle it out. He found the answer finally. His "long memory" carried him forty-four years, up to a day in 1916. His "short memory" had no recollection whatsoever of a "Walter Preston" save as a name mentioned by Fotheringham, the lawyer.

There was within the heart of the rejuvenated Preston no rancor for his son Walter. There was, indeed, quite the opposite! A great, heartwarming affection. Evidently, then, his quarrel with Walter had occurred subsequently to 1916; there was no recollection of it in his present mind.

Preston sighed. He was transcendently happy at his new health and heartiness, he looked forward with joyous anticipation to the conclusion of this rejuvenation process, a settling into normality. But damn it! the magic had its drawbacks, too. Frightful confusion!

But—his jaw stiffened—today was the day on which he had planned to dispose of Ralph. He had pledged himself that should any unexpected fate strike him, Enid and her weak husband would not profit by it. There was no time like the present. He sent for some breakfast. As he ate, he scanned the pages of the local telephone directory.

HE FOUND his party at the fourth hotel he called. Yes, they had a Mr. Walter Preston registered. Who was calling, please?

"Never mind that!" said Preston crisply. "Give me his rooms."

A childish treble answered the ring. Preston, who had been expecting to hear his son's bass voice, almost dropped the telephone in his astonishment. "Hello?" someone said. "Hello?"

"Who," demanded Preston, "are you?"

"I'm Johnny," replied the voice. "Who are you?"

Johnny! Would that be, wondered Preston, a diminutive for Jonathan? A strange, almost forgotten emotion choked him. With difficulty, he spoke again, ignoring the question.

"Let me speak to your father," he said.

A moment later, Walter's booming tones rephrased the query. "Hello? Who's calling?"

Preston said, "Hello, son!" He could almost feel the electric shock of his son's excitement.

Walter's voice came back to him in a shout; happy, incredulous, dazed. "Dad!"

"How are you, boy?" asked Preston.

"I'm fine. But . . . but I don't matter. How are you? And *where* are you? And what in the world is this all about? Did you run away on purpose? Are Ralph and Enid up to something phony? They're acting damned queer. If there's anything wrong, so help me, I'll tear them apart—"

"Easy, boy!" said Preston. "Easy does it! Always impatient, aren't you?"

"I'm impatient to see you. Where can I meet—"

Preston thought of his changed appearance, realized suddenly that it would be altogether too great a shock to Walter to meet a father whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and find him younger-looking than he had been at the time of their parting. He said, "You can't, son. Not just now, anyway. Later, perhaps. Now, listen—"

He chose his words carefully. There was lots to be done, and he wanted to get it over with quickly. "Listen," he said, "how much money have you?"

"Money? Why . . . why, not much *with* me, but my credit is good. I've done pretty well these past few years."

"Good!" said Preston. "I had to be sure. Now I'll tell you what you must do. Get in touch with your bankers. Scrape together every single penny you can beg, borrow, and steal. Tomorrow morning when the market opens, the Preston holdings are going to be thrown onto the floor. I want you to get control of those holdings. So start buying from the word go. And continue to buy, buy, buy, until you've bought up every last iota! Do you understand?"

"No," said Walter frankly. "I don't. Why should you do this, Dad? I realize you're offering me a tremendous gift in a roundabout way. But why—"

"Because it's the last ounce of control," explained Preston bitterly, "I

exercise over my own capital! Ralph and Enid have tied up everything I own but my corporation holdings. But if I milk my estate of those, they'll be left high and dry. Broke! And that's what I want to do.

"Oh, stop asking questions, will you? I'm too busy to explain any more now. I'll tell you all about it later. You just do what I say. You can swing it?"

Walter said, "I . . . I suppose so. Yes. I'm sure of it. But, Dad—if you'll let me come see you—"

"Stay away!" ordered Preston. "If Ralph found out where I am, they might spoil the whole scheme. He's trying to have me committed on grounds of insanity. Nonsense. I'm saner than I ever was.

"There's one thing you *can* do, though—" he added as an afterthought. "Slip a couple of hundred dollars in an envelope and send it to me at this address. Robert Thompson is the name I'm using. You will? Good! Well—see you in a few days then, son. You . . . you have a youngster, haven't you?"

Walter said proudly, "Two of them, Dad. Johnny and Sue. I want you to meet them. And my wife, too. I'm glad our . . . our fuss is a thing of the past."

A thing of the past, thought Preston. To him it was a thing that had never occurred. But he said, "So am I, boy. Well, don't forget. Buy! and keep buying!"

Then he called New York.

"EVERYTHING, Mr. Preston?" bleated his broker wildly. "Everything? But . . . but it will knock the bottom out of the whole market, sir? You can't mean to—"

"Do as I tell you!" snapped Lightning Preston. "I know what I'm doing. McLeod. Start selling the moment the market opens. And keep selling until I give you the order to stop."

There was a moment's studious silence. Then McLeod said, "There's been some talk up here, sir. I hope you'll forgive my mentioning it but—are you sure you're well, sir?"

Preston glanced at his reflection in the mirror of a lowboy and chuckled. "I haven't felt better," he said, "for decades! McLeod, I'll give you a little private tip. Start buying this stuff as it goes on the market and you'll clean up *big!* But don't pass the word around to any of your pals and don't try to grab too much, or by the pink horns of hell, I'll smash you! Do you understand?"

There was relief in McLeod's voice, and admiration.

"I think so, sir. It's a return to the good old days, eh? You're going to show 'em that you can still twist the old cat's tail?"

And the young one's, too, thought Preston grimly. But he grunted assent. "That's right. Now, remember—sell! And keep on selling till I tell you to stop. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. But if anything goes wrong—"

"Call me here!" Preston gave him the number. "But nothing *will* go wrong." And he hung up.

He took it easy the rest of the day. He wrote his diary with especial details as to his plan, lest it escape him overnight, then went out for a stroll. He had dinner in town and complained bitterly about the inferior quality of a white burgundy served him. He was thrilled by a motion picture in color, with speech apparently emanating from the actors on the screen, though a dimly tantalizing pseudomemory advised him he had experienced this same pleasure a day or so before. He found an envelope waiting for him upon his return to his room; it contained money from Walter and a plea that they meet "as soon as possible."

He had beer and sandwiches before retiring. Jonathan Preston, at middle age, had always been a hearty eater. His doctor had warned him that such midnight snacks paved the way for painful stomach ulcers, but this, Preston knew, was so much balderdash. Ulcers were the boggy man of weak-bellied hypochondriacs.

The beer made him comfortably drowsy.

HE WAS WAKENED in the morning by a clamorous jangling at his bedside. He groped for the alarm clock, but it wasn't an alarm; the bedlam came from a telephone. An odd-looking telephone in which mouthpiece and earpiece were curiously joined in one twisted unit. He snatched it up and growled into what he hoped was the right hole.

"Yes?" he said.

The excited voice of his stockbroker yammered into his ear. "Mr. Preston—are you sure you want me to keep on selling? Somebody's buying up the stuff as fast as I put it on the market! At this rate—"

Preston didn't know what the man was talking about, but he had presence of mind enough to keep his mouth shut until he found out. He said, "I'll call you back in a few minutes!" and reached for the closely written sheets of paper at his bedside which, some instinct told him, were essential to comprehension of this weird affair.

A few minutes later he was able to call McLeod with reassurance that everything was running according to expectancy. The broker mollified, though still apprehensive, Preston called his elder son. Walter was almost as apprehensive as had been the broker.

"Dad—is everything going all right?"

"Perfect!"

"I've been buying ever since the tape started. But the more I buy, the more comes on the market!"

"Well, what do you care? You're getting it cheaper now, aren't you?"

"That's just it. The Street's panicky. If Preston securities are valueless, what is worth anything? They're wondering. The S. E. C.—"

"Damn the S. E. C.!" roared Lightning Preston. "Has a man the right

to diddle his own affairs, or hasn't he? Keep on buying! The price will stabilize after a while. When it does, you'll be in the driver's seat."

Walter said, "But I'm getting to the bottom of my resources, Dad—"

"Then borrow! Or pawn your family plate or hold up a bank. Get money somehow. And buy—buy—buy!" Jonathan Preston added, more quietly. "You've got to get complete control, Walter. This is the only way I can transfer my wealth to you. Ralph has stripped me of all other powers."

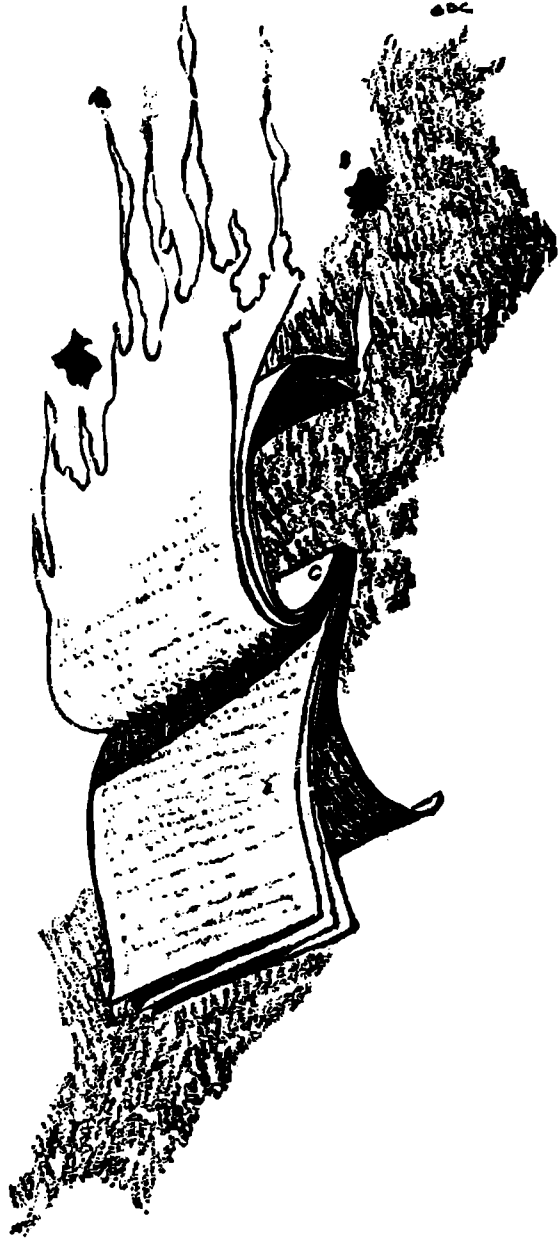
"Ralph—oh, yes! He called me. He's about to have a nervous breakdown. He knows you're behind this, Dad."

"Good!" said Preston. "I wanted him to know. Well, good-by, son!" And he hung up.

HE SOUGHT a stockbroker's office shortly thereafter; spent the few remaining morning hours and the early hours of the after-

noon watching, with grim satisfaction, the cryptic symbols of high finance slide across the illuminated screen.

He saw his own corporation holdings drop steadily for hours. 114—112 $\frac{7}{8}$ —109 $\frac{1}{8}$ —103—down to 100 even. Walter was making money now, he thought; the securities had a higher appraisal value than that! Then 96—92



—down to an all-time low of 88, matching the Black Friday price of '29 which Jonathan Preston now no longer remembered.

Then the reaction set in. The bulls sharpened their horns, and the bears turned tail for cover. Walter's steady buying began to make its influence felt; a few hopefuls leaped on the bandwagon, and the Street went into a buying frenzy. Preston's holdings, which had led the general collapse, now led the upward surge.

A sudden leap to 95. Another to 100, as the investors belatedly realized they had let a good thing slip through their fingers. Then 105—108½—110—“No Preston stocks available!” Preston heard the local stockbroker wail to a hundred eager would-be buyers. “No Consolidated—no Apex—not a share at any price!” 113—114—then *over* yesterday's quotation—116—120—122—

The juggled holdings were stabilized at 122 when the market closed. Jonathan Preston returned to his hotel. The gamblers in the board room did not recognize in the neatly dressed, thirty-nine-year-old stranger who had stood quietly watching the rise-and-fall of the market, the Jonathan Preston they were so wholeheartedly cussing out.

His phone was screaming madly when he got back to his room. It was McLeod. McLeod's voice was the worse for wear. He croaked hoarse relief at finally getting Preston:

“Mr. Preston, where have you been? I tried to get you all afternoon. Have you seen the papers?”

“I've seen the tape,” said Preston. “Come, my dear fellow! Don't chatter like that!”

“B-but you don't understand, Mr. Preston! It's awful! You . . . you've lost everything! Your tail-twisting plan didn't work. Someone was buying all afternoon. You've been completely wiped out! Your estate will be entailed for your debts. Everything is gone!”

Preston chuckled. He said, “How did *you* make out, McLeod?”

McLeod admitted, “I . . . I made a slight profit, sir. I bought, as you told me to. But I don't want it, sir! Not at such a cost. You're welcome to what little I gained—”

Preston was strangely touched. Odd that this chap, whose veins had always seemed to run with the dust of facts and figures, whose fingers were grimy with the ink of stocks and bonds, should turn out to have a heart and a conscience. He said gently, “That won't be necessary, McLeod. That's my gift to you. Thanks for everything. Good-by.”

McLeod cried, “But, Mr. Preston—”

“Good-by!” repeated Preston with finality. Then he called Walter. “Well, we swung it, son!”

Walter Preston seemed stunned with his good fortune. He said, “*You* swung it, Dad! I'm rich. Fabulously, rotten, stinking rich! But I still don't understand why—”

“I'll explain it to you,” said Preston, “shortly.”

"When, Dad? Now? Shall I come over?"

"No! Don't try to find me. I'm checking out of here in a few minutes." Preston, seeing in the mirror that faced him the image of a man little beyond the prime of life, did not want his son to meet him without being prepared for a shock. If this constant rate of rejuvenescence continued, Preston figured that by tomorrow it would have reached its conclusion. He would have regained, then, the youth and vigor for which he had yearned. That was the time to meet Walter. "Perhaps tomorrow, Walter. Surely not later than the next day."

"Very well, sir. As you say."

Preston said, "By the way, son—don't be surprised if you notice some . . . er . . . change in me when we meet."

"Change?" Walter was suddenly anxious. "You're not ill, Dad?"

"Far from it. But you'll see. Good-by, boy!"

He had, he felt, lived a full and glorious day. He deserved a rest. So he spent the rest of the afternoon and evening luxuriously enjoying the fruits of his newfound well-being. He took a long, sweat-bringing walk through Miami's lovely and extensive suburbs, thrilling keenly to the feel of young, springy muscles beneath him, savoring to the full the rich, tropical scents of orange, palm and mimosa that mingled with the salt of nearby ocean air.

And at night, as he sought his bed in the new hotel to which he had gone, lest Walter impatiently seek him out, he read and reread the columns devoted to this latest evidence of Lightning Preston's financial acumen.

## **TREMENDOUS COUP ROCKS WALL STREET EDIFICE!**

**Walter Preston, Son of Missing Financier, Seizes Control of Father's Empire in Daring Attack!**

Jonathan Preston chuckled heartily over that. He gained even more pleasure from a brief addendum to the story, though.

Reporters were unable to get a statement from the younger son of Jonathan Preston at the time the paper went to press. Ralph Preston, who was reduced from riches to rags in this afternoon's four-hour cataclysm, was reported to be hovering on the brink of a nervous collapse.

HE HAD HOPED that when he wakened the next morning it would be to look in the mirror upon a Jonathan Preston little changed from the Preston who had gone to bed. That hope, however, was blasted. His reflection showed him a man of thirty-four, a young man, black of hair and keen of eye, somewhat too heavy for the garments he wore, and certainly too youthful in appearance to be wearing an Oxford gray business suit with a piped vest.

He would, Preston knew, have to do something about the clothing situation. It was vitally essential that he be inconspicuous for a while; he could not be so in clothes too old for him and so tight that they strained at every seam.

He went to a clothier's. The salesman looked disapprovingly at the style of suit Preston was wearing, but with approval at its cut and cloth. He said, "A nice suit, sir. Lancaster Brothers, New York, isn't it? The touch is unmistakable. But too old for you, sir! Oh, much too old! A young man like you needs—"

He brought forth a dazzling creation of angular hues gone mad—and Preston shuddered. They compromised finally on a somewhat less gaudy, but still rather blatant, three-button job in shark's-tooth gray, with peaked lapels and welted seams. It needed alterations.

The salesman called the shop's tailor; the tailor sketched soapmarks and mumbled around a mouthful of pins, "You wan dit by dumorrow, mebbe? Or nexd day?"

"This afternoon," said Preston.

The tailor looked pained. "I god ten, perhabs twelf, odor suids come first? Dumorrow morning first thing?"

"Never mind," said Preston, shrugging off the coat. "I'll go somewhere else."

The salesman had sudden visions of seventy-five dollars winging blithely into a competitor's pockets. He said hastily, "It will be ready this afternoon, Mr. Er-umm! Won't it, Jake? *Won't* it?" he repeated dangerously.

Jake sighed but nodded. "Hokay," he assented glumly. "Bud tree o'clock. Can'd ged dit done sooner."

Preston went to a movie. His "short memory" classified these pictorial interludes as a pleasant form of amusement, but his "long memory," which every day seemed to waken fresh and new and startlingly naïve, interpolated a motif of surprise. One part of him thoroughly enjoyed the heroic antics of the handsome Hollywood juvenile and his lissom companion; the other half commented acidly that this form of entertainment could never replace the legitimate stage. These monstrously aggrandized Titans, weaving across a screen in a blaze of light, were no match for the theater of his day.

His day? What was his day? That thought, intruding on him, spoiled his pleasure. Furthermore, he did not feel particularly well. But he remained to the end of the picture, then returned to the clothing store.

The salesman bustled forward buoyantly. "Right on time, Mr. Hrrumph! Your suit's all ready for you. Beautiful suit, sir! You're going to like it. Here you are—"

He thrust it upon Preston, who carried it into the telephone-booth-sized dressing room and struggled into it. It didn't feel exactly right. He didn't know just how poor a fit it was until, a few minutes later, he looked into a full-length mirror. Then he, like the salesman and the tailor who stood beside him, stared hopelessly at a coat which draped on him like a quilt, at trousers too full in the waist which literally bagged at seat and knee.

The tailor wailed aloud, and pins flew. "Vot is id? Twenty years I been dailoring gloze; never in my life did I such a misdake make? Id *can'd* bel Either the wrong suid god aldered, else you been *shringink*, misder!"



"It . . . it's the suit!" faltered Preston. "You must have altered the wrong suit!" he said desperately.

But in his heart of hearts, even as he spoke, he knew he lied. He understood, because he knew something that these two men did not. He understood, because the Preston whom he looked upon in the mirror was leaner of face and body than the Preston who had risen this morning. He understood, for he remembered with a dull, sickening clarity that the young Jonathan Preston had always been slender—that it was not until his thirty-fifth year that he had begun to gain weight!

HE BOUGHT a smaller suit, one that did not require alterations, and wore it from the store. He dumped his old suit into a Bundles for Britain container and set, anxious-eyed, about his search.

For he knew only too well, now, what he must do. This thing had gone too far. The Fountain's magic was working not only up to but far beyond his expectations. He had hoped to find his youth. Well, he had found it. Thirty or thirty-one, he thought, was the perfect age.

But the necromancy showed no signs of coming to an end. Would it, tomorrow say, when he was twenty-five? Or the next day, when he was twenty? Any age beyond that—

He must find the mysterious stranger whom he had met at the Fountain. Somehow and dimly he felt that this queer-talking old codger, with his unsightly beard and old-fashioned grinder, knew the answer to his riddle. Could advise him what to do. Perhaps there was something he had not done right? Perhaps another dip in the Fountain? He knew where it was, or—he stopped in his tracks—did he? The glades. It was somewhere in the glades. A piece of doggerel verse—

But, of course! He had given that to the old chap. He must get it.

Thus he began searching. His search was necessarily an aimless, haphazard one. He did not know the old chap's name, nor did he have a particularly clear mental picture of him. To further complicate matters, he dared not risk going to the police for aid. He did not fear identification. The change had gone too far for that, now. But he feared questioning. With his altered mind in its present chaotic state, there was no telling what fantastic thing he might say, what anachronism of speech or deed might rouse their suspicions.

But he had strength and youth and vigor and unlimited time. He began searching Miami for a sign of the old man.

HIS QUEST was even more hopeless than he had feared. He did not find him that day nor the next. After the first few fearful hours, he began asking questions. Guardedly, of course. "Excuse me, friend—have you seen an old chap with a dirty white beard around here? Scissors grinder?"

Always the shake of the head, often the blank response. "No, can't say that I have. Sorry. But I'm a stranger here myself."

Stopping people in downtown Miami. "Excuse me, but have you seen an old scissors grinder around here?"

"Sorry, bud!"

"Excuse me. A scissors grinder. He might be carrying something like an hourglass."

"Sorry." People looking at him strangely.

He almost found him once. That was on the afternoon of the third day of his search. By then he had sloughed off all signs of his once withered age. He was now the slender, tousle-haired Bob Preston he had been at the age of twenty-four. And by now, tormented by fatigue, despair, and a growing anxiety he hardly dared consider; he was willing to ask *anyone* his question.

He asked a traffic officer at a main intersection.

"Pardon me, officer, but have you seen a bearded old fellow around here lately? Scissors grinder chap?"

The policeman bawled, "*O. K., wise guy! Cancha see the lights? What say, mister? A scissors grinder? Why, it seems like I did see him. Just a few minutes ago.*"

Preston's heart leaped. "You did? Which way did he go?"

"I didn't notice. Think it was down that way. *Hey, buddy! Walk in the lanes!*"

"Please try to remember," pleaded Preston. "Can't you? It's very important, officer. Well—down that way?" And he started to run in the direction the officer had designated. But the policeman grabbed his arm.

"Hold it, mister! Don't go bustin' out into the traffic like that! Seen a guy get knocked off here no more'n ten minutes ago doin' the same crazy thing!"



PRESTON did not find his mysterious friend that day. He did not find him the next morning, either. But he solved his problem. And the manner of its solution was strange.

He woke at seven, his sensations oddly torn between those of superb well-being and a deep-rooted melancholy. He knew, even before he glanced into the mirror which was fast becoming a horror to him, that he would look upon a stripling barely out of his teens. He was right. The Preston he ~~saw~~ was the young, volatile Bob Preston he had been at the age of twenty.

His faithfully kept diary was more than ever needful these days. Only with its aid could he each morning rebuild about him a recognizably logical world. Otherwise his 1896 brain would have been strained to insanity by the strangeness into which he stepped when he left his room.

He read the diary, realizing with certainty that he must, today, find the stranger in whose hands lay the answer to his problem. After breakfasting, he turned his footsteps toward the one remaining section of town as yet uncombed; the tenement district.

All morning he subjected its residents to the query now grown loathsome to his lips. "Excuse me, but—" And all morning he listened to the inevitable reply. "Sorry—" Noontime was approaching when he came upon a small, heavy-eyed Italian sitting upon the steps of his tenement home.

Preston almost didn't stop. There was such dejection in the little foreigner's attitude that he was inclined to pass him by. But force of habit, the desire to leave not a single stone unturned, the pressing urgency of his own need, halted him. "Excuse me, friend—" he said.

The little man looked at him, and Preston saw that his eyes were red. He had been weeping. "Yes?"

"I'm sorry to bother you. But—have you happened to see an old fellow around here? Bearded man with a grindstone slung over one shoulder."

"Yes," said the little man in a lackluster voice. "Yes, I saw him. He was here."

"You saw him!" Preston's hopes flamed. He gripped the Italian's shoulder fiercely. "You mean this is where he lives?"

"No, *signor*. He visited. Last night he was here. I passed him on these steps. But he is gone now. He called on one of my neighbors perhaps; who knows? I have not seen him today."

"But if he visited here," exulted Preston, "someone in these flats knows him! I'll find him now!" He pushed by the Italian, started up the steep steps. But the man halted him. "Please, *signor*! There is no one there now but . . . but my wife."

"Perhaps she knows? Women know all the peddlers—"

The little man shook his head. "I am sorry, *signor*. But my wife, she is dead. She died last night."

It was then that Jonathan Preston terribly knew the identity of the man he had been seeking—

HE COULD NOT afterward account for the remainder of the afternoon hours. All he knew was that he walked. And as he walked, there walked with him a cold, brain-maddening comprehension as weighty as the brazen scales of doom.

He should have known! That was the one tormenting cry that returned to him ever and again, beating at him with the insistence of a recurrent symphonic motif. How could he have been so blind? He should have guessed in the beginning. An old and bearded man—a scissors grinder—a sharpener of scythes—who bore in one concealed hand an hourglass—

The death of the sun, and the cool, scented breezes of evening soothed the chaos of his brain. His madness left him, and he sat down on a park bench to take calm appraisal of his situation.

With the application of reason, all things which he had considered mysteries now became clear. The old scissor grinder's warning. The frightening-swift action of the Fountain. His own rejuvenation, and its only logical end.

The Fountain he found *had* been the Font of Ponce de Leon. That, now, was undeniable. And it did, as legend and the verse betold, "shedde men's years." But not as most men thought. Not in the way Jonathan Preston had hoped when, an aged semi-invalid, he had bathed in its lambent green water.

What it did was turn backward the clock of life for him who dipped in it! Stayed evolution toward age, returning the bather back through the days he had lived. Back to the day of his beginning!

To some men, a dip in the Fountain would be a boon. Preston could see where a man of, say, forty, with an allotted span of eighty years, would benefit magnificently by the pool's magic. The days of his years would halt and reverse themselves; he would relive, day for day and hour for hour, twenty years of youth and twenty years of childhood.

How many men, long gone, thought Preston, had done just that? How many of those shadowy figures his imagination had conjured from the depths of the evergreen glade had lost their years through the Fountain's "curséd" necromancy? Many, perhaps. Some, of a certainty, else there would have been no legend, no cryptic warning—"Let him all men bewair!" There were folk tales, too, of changelings. Were these once-mature men upon whom the Fountain had worked its magic?

But in *his* case, time had not returned upon itself at a leisurely pace. The days of his years had sped by like lightning—Preston stopped to calculate the rate of speed at which the years had sloughed from him—and since his dip in the Fountain, he had been whirling back to infancy at a rate of five years per day!

Five years per day! Two and a half months per hour—thirty-odd hours each minute—each breath he drew into his lungs sped him backward in time, inexorably, toward that which was now at once the beginning and the end!

That was what the old scissor grinder, whose other name Preston now knew, had meant when he said, "Nothing will really help. Your story is

already written in the book of time—not even the Fountain can help *that!*” He had known that the return of youth, to Preston, could be but a brief, dizzy moment of gladness. And then—the finale. The book of time closed Preston’s chapter in his seventieth year; it was but a monstrous joke that he should relive his entire sixty-nine years, eleven months and two weeks in fourteen days’ time!

Yes, that was how it was. That was how it must be. No other explanation so perfectly dovetailed with Preston’s experiences.

And having gone thus far, he took the last remaining logical step. He computed the little time that was left to him. Even as he sat here pondering, precious moments of this time had slipped away. It was now seven o’clock on the evening of Tuesday, March 13th. He was Jonathan R. Preston, whose age was perilously close to seventy, but whose brain and body were those of Bob Preston, aged eighteen.

There remained to him, figured Preston, approximately three days and sixteen hours. After that—

He stood up. He dared not think beyond that point.

Now that he ultimately knew what lay before him, it was as though a great, oppressive burden had been lifted off his shoulders. All his life, Jonathan Preston had lived beneath a cloud. The secret, dark-flowering fear of Death. It was a fear that had dulled the keen edge of every joy, every triumph and excitement, he had ever known. It had stolen the pleasure of his business successes, had stilled the delights of travel and adventure; its gall had flavored every bite of food he ever ate, fouled every scent he smelled, thrummed an undertone to every music he heard. Fear of Death had been a dark, unwelcome guest wherever Preston had gone. But now it was gone.

It was gone—and his house was in order! His last great fling in business had avenged him of a present wrong, atoned an older one. Ralph’s treachery was punished. Enid was broken. Yet Preston knew, somehow, that Enid and Ralph would never know need. Walter would see to that. This, too, pleased Preston. In his present mood he harbored no resentment toward anyone. He did not want his younger son’s fate to be too ‘harsh—

Yes, his house was in order. And an ancient dread was gone from his heart. And time was a precious nectar he must drink in haste and riotously before it drip away.

His last night of warm-flowing youth was a night to long remember. What places he went, what sights he saw and what sounds he heard, what things he did with wild, lavish abandon, what joys of youth he embraced feverishly before it should be too late—these were memories to braven a man’s heart whatever might afterward come.

But Preston did not remember them. When he wakened the next morning, clear-eyed and quick with health though he had been but three hours abed, his memory was that of young Bobby Preston—whose age was fifteen years.

IT WAS in leaving his hotel, stealing furtively out by a side entrance lest the desk clerk question his right to be there, that Preston realized there was one loose end left dangling in the skein of his waning existence.

The diary he had left in the room of the Fountain House! It must not be found. If Jonathan Preston must fade from the knowledge of man, it were better that his fate forever remain a mystery. The diary must still be where he had left it. The Fountain House was a quiet hotel, and his room rent had been paid in advance; apparently 803 was still reserved in the name of the absentee, James Smith.

It took some little doing. Bobby Preston lingered for more than an hour in the lobby of the Fountain House, trying to figure some way of getting the key to 803 from its pigeonhole. It was impossible. The day clerk hovered before the racks like a brooding mother hen.

Bobby even went to the manager, applied for a job as bellboy. He had some idea of getting hold of the master key— But the manager laughed at him and patted his back pleasantly. "Come back in a couple of years, sonny. You're too young. You should be in school—say, why *aren't* you in school, anyway?"

Preston fled, fuming indignantly. He dared not use the elevators, but he went around through the music room and climbed the back stairway to the eighth floor. Legitimate means were vain, therefore he must force an entrance to the room. He remembered, suddenly, that the maid was accustomed to "airing" the rooms about this time of day. The windows would be open.

Blind luck played into his hands. Beneath the windows of the eighth-floor rooms ran a foot-wide ledge. Plenty wide enough for an agile youngster to walk out upon, skirting the sharp corner of the building after he had gained an exit through the corridor window, facing the wall, pressing hands hard against too-smooth stone, sliding one foot at a time forward, not daring to look down at the streets below, where pygmy humans scurried back and forth, darted in and out of buildings like restless ants.

And then—he was in the room! It was just as he had left it except that his few spare articles of clothing, now valueless to a boy who had that morning been forced to swap "his brother's" new suit for wearing apparel, had been hung tidily in the wardrobe.

The money he had left in the drawer was untouched; Bobby stuffed it hastily into his pocket. Better yet, his diary still lay, sealed and unfolded, on his bedside table. He picked it up—

And at that moment a key grated in the lock!

IT WAS instinct rather than reason that made Bobby Preston leap to the door, slam on the deadlatch. As he did so, he heard a startled exclamation from without; a woman's voice cried shrill alarm. The chambermaid slipped down the hall, bleating.

The ten-day-old brain of Jonathan Preston growled, "Damn!" and the

word sounded strange in the piping voice of Bobby Preston. He was in for it now! But they mustn't find these sheets—

He struck a match and cupped it to the envelope—felt the licking flame scorch his fingers, then tossed the blazing pages out the window. They drifted lazily downward, shedding black, feathery scales as they fell. Bobby ducked for the window ledge.

But even as he did so, the babble of voices sounded behind him, a head popped from the window of the room he had just quitted, startled eyes gleamed angrily as they saw him.

"Why, it's a kid! A lousy little sneak thief. You can't get away, kid! Head him off at the hall window, Bill. You might as well come back, you little punk!"

He was trapped, no doubt about that. There was no way out save down. And down was a long, long way. Bobby Preston gave up. Meekly he crawled back and surrendered himself to the ear-cuffing ire of the hotel detective.

The ride through Miami's bustling thoroughfares in a bright-red police car was thrilling. Bobby Preston would have enjoyed it much more if the gruff, burly officer who drove had let him sound the siren. But he wouldn't. Bobby decided maybe he wouldn't become a cop, after all; he'd be a fireman, instead. Cops were darn old grouches.

Thus swiftly, as the effervescent thought-processes of boyhood claimed him, did Bobby Preston forget the reason for his being here. A few minutes later he stood studying with wide-eyed interest the interior of the city hoosegow as an harassed desk sergeant grumbled violently.

"There ain't no kid's court till tomorrow morning! We can't keep him here! If anybody found out about it, they'd raise— What's your name, kid?"

"Huh?" said Preston. "My name? Why—" He stopped. There was some reason he should not tell. He didn't know why not, but there was *some* reason.

"See?" complained the sergeant. "A feeb! He don't even know his own name. Ain't that flatfoot got nothin' better to do than nip half-wit youngsters? Lock him up overnight, Flannigan. We'll send him up to J. C. in the morning—"

Thus, three days short of his seventieth birthday, at the apparent age of fourteen, Jonathan Preston, lifelong member of the Civic Purity League and outspoken exponent of firm treatment for petty criminals, was for the first time in his dual existence heaved into durance vile.

Bobby Preston thoroughly enjoyed it. The barred cell was glamorous, and he liked the funny folding cot that hung from the wall. It made him itch, though, when he went to sleep that night.

WHEN HE WOKE in the morning he was scared, because he didn't know where he was. Everything was all wrong. He was not in his room, and

instead of the soft farm sounds he heard mysterious, frightening noises from outside. Barking noises like firecrackers made at the Fair on the Fourth of July, except they were more muffled and regular.

Then a man came and unlocked the door. "Come on, kid!" he said. Bobby shuffled out miserably. His clothes didn't fit right. He was hungry and scared. He didn't know where he was.

He said, "Where . . . where are we going, mister?"

The man had a blue suit with shiny buttons. He had a pistol, too. He took such long steps that Bobby was forced to trot. He answered briefly, "J. C."

"Where's that?"

"It ain't a where. It's a what. Juvenile Court." The policeman looked at him strangely. "They must have been nuts, putting a kid your age in hinky overnight. If you got any folks, they can raise an awful stink about it."

"What?" said Bobby.

"Nothin'. Skip it, kid."

A few minutes later they were standing in a tremendous room, all oak and plaster and shining brass, and an old man in a black suit was staring at Bobby curiously. "What's the charge against this boy?"

A man with spectacles read words Bobby didn't understand. "Petty larceny. Breaking and entering a hotel room with intent to steal, maraud, and otherwise—"

"Petty nonsense!" snapped the old man. "Who brings this charge? You, there . . . you're the house detective of the Fountain House, aren't you? What's the complaint?"

A big man with a red face came forward from the back of the room. He said, "Well, it was like this, your honor. The chambermaid on the eighth floor called and says somebody was in one of the rooms. When I come runnin', I found this here kid—"

He paused to jerk a thumb at Bobby, saw the boy and stopped in mid-sentence.

"Go on!" prodded the Juvenile Court judge. "Go on!"

"B-but that ain't him!" said the detective. "That ain't the kid!"

The old man turned toward the policeman. "Well?" he demanded. The cop shook his head. "It's the only kid was brought in last night," he declared.

"It ain't him!" repeated the detective stubbornly. "I oughta know; I seen him. He was a lot older than this here youngster. They must of made a mistake—"

"Your honor, this is the only youngster we kept overnight!"

"Nuts! You dumb cops pulled a boner. This ain't the kid. I never seen—"

"Boner! Listen, flatfoot, if anybody pulled a—"

"Stop it!" The old man banged a wooden hammer on his desk and Bobby jumped. An embarrassed silence settled over the room. "Am I to



understand," demanded the old man, "there is no charge against this boy?"

"He brought it," said the policeman. "He's supposed to identify the kid."

"Not me!" The house dick's face was scarlet. "Not me! I never seen this kid before in my life. Your honor—"

"That's enough of this nonsense! Case dismissed! I hope this child's parents don't press suit against you, sir; they can make it most uncomfortable for you. Officer, see that the boy is given a good breakfast and turn him loose." The old man leaned forward. "Sonny, can you find your way home?"

Bobby's lips trembled. "I . . . I don't know, mister. I—"

"Well, if you have any trouble, go to the nearest police officer. He'll help you. All right—*next case!*"

AN HOUR LATER he was trudging the unfamiliar streets of an unfamiliar city, seeking something or someone he could not name. All he knew was that he was Bobby Preston, whose home was in Burton's Crossing, who was nine years of age and terribly confused because he didn't know where he was.

He was the more confused because way back deep in his mind there was a tantalizing little memory that told him this was as things were and as they should be. Which, Bobby knew, was false. Because he should be in school now. Today was Parents Day. There would be visitors and recitations and prizes for the best at spelling and history and 'rithmetic.

He came at last to a broad, green lawn, sprawling up to a great white house with pillars. He felt, dimly, that he had somewhere seen this house before. But that was a fleeting thought, for as he stood staring at it a boy his own age appeared from behind a clump of hedge, looked at him appraisingly and said, "Hello."

"Hello!" said Bobby. "What you got there?"

"A ball," said the other boy proudly. "An official 'Merican League ball. I've got two gloves, too." He looked lonely. He said, "Want to catch?"

'Sure!' said Bobby. They played, and as they did they moved farther up onto the lawn, nearer the house. The sun was warm and fragrant. After a while the other youngster said, "I'm Johnny Preston. Who are you?"

"I'm Bobby." Again some instinct stronger than himself restrained him from giving his last name, so surprisingly identical with his playmate's. He couldn't explain why. He wasn't ashamed of his name. His father was one of the biggest farmholders around Burton's Crossing. Maybe Johnny *did* have a bigger front yard, but they had a farm and barns and cows at *his* house.

"Bobby what?" demanded Johnny, then forgot his question in disgust as a slim, excited figure came skipping down the lawn. "Aw, nuts! Here comes Sue! Now she'll want to play!"

Bobby didn't like girls, either, but he had to admit Sue had a good idea. She suggested swimming, and the three of them had a good time in the pool beside the house. He had to admit, too, that it was fun playing at Johnny's

house. In the late afternoon a tall, quiet, horse-faced man whom Johnny called "Lorrimer" brought them lemonade and cookies. Later, as they were sprawling on the grass playing like somebody had given them three wishes—"a solid-gold airplane," Johnny would wish for, "with diamond wings!"—a pleasant woman came down to speak to them. Johnny's mother.

It was, she said, almost dinner time. Hadn't they better run along now and get ready? Father would be home any minute. And who was this little boy?

This was Bobby, explained Johnny. His new friend.

That was nice. But it was getting late. His mother and father would be worried about him. Hadn't he better run along home now?

Inexplicable loneliness settled once again on Bobby. His eyes glistened. He had a home—somewhere—but it had disappeared that morning. Disappeared into a strange, warm world where the buildings and the trees and even the things people wore were strange. He shook his head.

"I . . . I don't have any home," he said.

"But your parents, child!"

"They're gone," said Bobby, wistfully.

Alice Preston looked at him, swift sympathy shining in her eyes. She noticed then, for the first time, that his clothes were someone's cast-offs, too large for his slender frame. His hair needed cutting. His face—

She gasped! It was remarkable! Walter would have to see this boy—and there was Walter now, walking to join them. "Walter!" she cried.

The tall, heavy-set man with pleasant smile wrinkles about his eyes linked his arm in hers, kissed her. He shook his head.

"No luck, darling. Not a sign of him anywhere. I don't understand it. I went to the hotel he called me from. They said no man answering that description had registered there. 'Robert Thompson' was a man younger than myself."

"Enid and Ralph?"

"Gone back to New York. They might as well use the town house. Ralph's a changed man. He asked me if I could put him to work in one of Dad's . . . my . . . companies. I'm going to give him a chance. He used to be a pretty fair businessman before he started this 'heavy-society' stuff." He laid aside his personal troubles, scooped his daughter into his arms and ruffled his son's hair. "Well, what have you two been doing all day? And who's *this* young man?"

"I'm Bobby," said Bobby. He liked Johnny's father. He was nice.

Alice Preston said eagerly. "Look at him, Walter! Doesn't he remind you of—someone?"

"Hm-m-m? Why, I don't know that—"

"Look closely! Remember that picture your mother gave me years ago? The one you used to pretend you hated?"

"By Jove!" Preston's eyes widened. "Why, he does, doesn't he? An amazing resemblance!"

Sue demanded, "Who does he look like, mamma? Who does Bobby look like?"

"Your father, dear. He's the image of your father, when *he* was a little boy—"

BOBBY had dinner at the Preston's home that night. It was a good dinner. Afterward, as he and Johnny and Sue played parchesi, he heard Mr. and Mrs. Preston discussing him. He pretended not to hear, but he hoped Mrs. Preston would have her way.

"We can't just turn him out into the night, dear," she argued. "He has no home, no family, nowhere to go. We must let him stay here."

Preston said, "We-e-ell—I guess it would be all right. For tonight, anyway. But in the morning I'll try to see if I can find out where he came from. The child can't simply have dropped from nowhere. Where shall we put him?"

"In your father's room?"

So it was that an hour or so later Bobby, with the Preston children, was bundled off to bed in a huge room on the second floor. It was as he entered this room that, for the last time, a dying flicker of memory stirred through him. He experienced a strange sensation of having some time been here before.

But he was too tired to think much about it. The butler, Lorrimer, tucked him into bed and turned the lights out. And Bobby—Bobby what?—Preston? No, that was his friend's last name. Bobby yawned. And slept.

HE WAS WAKENED in the darkness that precedes dawn by the touch of a hand on his shoulder. When he sat up in bed, there was a figure beside him. The dim silhouette of an old man with a close-cropped beard; a man whose shoulders were weighted with a heavy, awkward wheel.

"I think we'd better be going now, Bobby," said the scissors grinder.

"Going?" said Bobby.

"It wouldn't do to stay here, you know. There's very little time left, and we have a long way to go."

Bobby didn't understand, any more than he understood what he was doing in this strange, big room. But the old man seemed friendly enough, even if his whiskers were untidy. Bobby rose obediently and dressed. The scissors grinder waited patiently. He held something in his hand—a something on which the gray light of false dawn glinted. Bobby reached for it, touched it.

"What's that?" he asked.

"It's the Sands, Bobby. You can see they've nearly run out. We must hurry now."

Bobby saw it was an hourglass, something like the one his mother used in the kitchen, only bigger. He saw how nearly all the sand had dripped, now, into the lower bell. But a few scattered grains remained on top, and

these made a hurried, ever increasingly fast whirlpool of black as they trickled into the bottom glass.

"I'm ready now," he said.

HE DID NOT KNOW how long they traveled or how far they went. It was a long, long way. It was dark of morning when they started; they left the city and walked into the girdling woodlands. The trees in the shadows rustled, and the trees in the moonlight glistened. The road was long and dusty.

Then the sun came up: gray-gold and warm. Bobby was hungry, but they did not stop to eat. They hurried on. Away from the paved roads, onto old, forgotten paths thick with neglect. Bobby took the old man's hand for comfort.

The scissors grinder said, "You're not afraid of me any more, Bobby?"

Bobby said stoutly, "I'm not afraid of anything. I'm going to be a soldier when I grow up. I'm going out West to fight Indians."

The sun climbed higher and higher, and Bobby grew more weary. For a while longer he matched the old scissors grinder's slow, forward march. Then he could no longer keep up to him. He was so very small; when he tried to walk it was heel-and-toe; he fell down once, and started to cry.

"It's not far now, Bobby," said the old man. "Just a little while—"

But he picked him up and carried him.

They came at last to a rounded hill, strangely out of place in these miasmatic swamplands because its shape was the shape of a noseless skull, and at its base was a little glade of shining evergreen.

To this the old man bore him. In the heart of the grove they came upon a pool. Its waters were cool and green; from its center jetted a Fountain whose soft-pluming waters were like the glory of sunlight on countless precious gems.

Wee Bobby stirred in his guardian's arms as his eye was caught by the dancing beauty; he stirred and cooed and stretched forth tiny, formless hands. There was no thought in his baby mind save a desire to touch this wonder. The old man put him down. He crawled, weaving and uncertain, toward the beckoning Fountain.

He gained it as the bright sun, touching noon, smote the Fountain with a flaming burst of light. For an instant his senses knew the warmth of welcoming waters; the music of the Fountain was soft crooning to his ears. Then there was the rocking-sweet caress of liquid depths—a slow and pulsant happiness beyond conception—then no more—

The last dark mote of sand drifted lazily into the bottom of the glass.

"Sleep well, Bobby," said the old scissors grinder. "Sleep you well, Jonathan Preston—"

Then he, too, was off and away. It was only noon, and he had much work to do.

THE END.