

fantastic

ADVENTURES

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 3
MARCH
1940

Contents

STORIES



The Priestess Who Rebelled returns next month in another thrilling fantasy laid in the future when women rule the world and few men retain their self respect



Copyright, 1940

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
808 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

William B. Ziff, Publisher
B. G. Davis, Editor

Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor
David Varn, Associate Editor
Harman R. Bollin, Art Director

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached, and artists should inclose or forward return postage. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements. Payment for manuscripts and illustrations will be made at our current rates.

The names of all characters that are used in short stories, serials and semi-fiction articles that deal with types are fictitious. Use of a name that is the same as that of any living person is accidental.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
MARCH 1940
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 808 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. Entry as second-class matter applied for at the Post Office, Chicago, Ill. under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscriptions \$2.40 a year (12 issues); Foreign, \$3.50.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE.....by Eando Binder 8

To one of the Little People, venturing into the domain of the Big People was the height of adventure. But brave little Atho became too bold . . . !

JALU OF RADIANT VALLEY.....by Orlin Tremaine 30

One lone woman against seven madmen isn't too great odds when that woman is Jalu The Golden fighting for the love and life of her Kalen.

THE MAN WHO WEIGHED MINUS TWELVE. by Nelson S. Bond 48

There are a lot of odd things connected with the phenomenon of weighing less than nothing, but Uncle Herman didn't suspect the danger facing him.

VOLCANO SLAVES OF MU. . . .by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. 54

"When a golden-haired stranger comes, then is the fall of the city of Cnef near." Such was the legend that spelled trouble to Kirk, The Wanderer.

LUNAR LOOT.....by Edwin Benson 64

How could the pirate know exactly when and where to intercept his victims in space, where ships are as hard to see as motes in the dark?

THE PRINCE OF MARS RETURNS (Part II—Conclusion) by Phil Nowlan 70

Dan Hanley brings back to Mars the glory and romance of the past as he plunges across the red world to battle for Lilrin of the Ta n'Ur.

FEATURES

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| The Editor's Notebook..... | 6 |
| Fantastic Hoaxes..... | 28 |
| Romance of The Elements..... | 83 |
| Quiz Page..... | 84 |
| Reader's Page..... | 85 |
| Introducing The Author..... | 92 |
| Correspondence Corner..... | 94 |
| Life On Neptune..... | 96 |
| Contest Page..... | 97 |

Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua depicting a scene from *The Little People*
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul

Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, H.R. Hammond, Julian E. Krupa, Leo Morey, Jay Jackson, Joe Sewell.

The Man Who Weighed Minus 12

By
NELSON S. BOND

It's a tremendous bother to find yourself weighing less than nothing, but even such a phenomenon can be turned to profit. Take horse-racing for instance . . .



"Uncle Herman," said Jack. "Meet Mr. Harkness. He didn't believe about you, so I brought him in to convince him"



IT served Jack damn good and right for talking so much. I finished the last handful of salted peanuts while he was telling the one about the old maid school teacher and the stammering salesman. After that we took a gander at the refrigerator and discovered we'd polished off all the beer, so Jack said let's go to bed. So we did.

It was plenty drowsy and the bed felt good. But I still had my worries, you understand. In spite of Jack and his friendly chatter, there was still the Gold Stakes for me to fret about. And my nag, Printer's Ink. And the idiotic 126-pound impost the track officials had slapped on him.

I lay there for awhile, though, thinking what a swell guy Jack was, and wondering what in hell he had been so mysterious about. He'd said he had figured the way out for me, and he'd laughed when he said "way." So I'd spent all that day waiting, and now I was waiting for sleep to come and get me.

And then suddenly I heard it. A little pitty-pat sound from the room below mine. No, not the room. It was more as if someone were scraping the ceiling.

I thought, "Mice?" But I knew it wasn't mice. So I thought, "Rats?" But that was wrong, too. Then I thought, "Hey, burglars!" and sat up in bed. I yelled, "Jack!"

Jack stopped sloshing water around and came out of the bathroom. "Whazzup?" he said.

"Listen," I told him, "there's somebody downstairs. You got a gun? It sounds to me like—"

Jack cocked his head and listened for a second. Then he grinned.

"Oh, that? That's just Uncle Herman."

"Uncle Herman? I didn't know how you had an uncle."

"Can I help it if I have relatives? He came here to live with us a couple of months ago."

I said, "What are you trying to do, kid me? Uncle Herman wasn't at dinner tonight. And besides, if that's his room below mine, he's either nine feet tall or he has wings. Those sounds are coming from the ceiling of that room!"

Jack looked embarrassed. "Yeah," he said.

"What do you mean—yeah?"

He said, "Look, Bill, I'll tell you all about it in the morning. That's the answer I had in mind for you, only I couldn't do anything about it today. You see, Uncle Herman is a little—well, odd."

"Oh," I said. "I'm sorry, Jack. I didn't know."

Jack's face darkened. He said stiffly, "Don't be a dope. He's not off his button. He's perfectly normal mentally. His trouble is—well, I guess you'd say physical."

I agreed with him. "You've got something there, pal. He's twelve feet tall and folds up like a jack-knife. What's he doing now? Standing on his head and tap-dancing on the ceiling?"

"He's—" began Jack. Then he shrugged. "Oh, to hell with it! Come along!"

"Where?" I asked. "It's getting kind of late."

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you. And I'm as impatient as you are. Come on!"

SO we went downstairs. Jack knocked on the door of the room just below mine and a pleasant voice called:

"Come in! Come in!" So we went in.

That is, Jack went in. I fell in. It hadn't occurred to me that there might be anything abnormal about the doorway, so I didn't even notice that it began about a foot above the floor level. As a result I took a nosedive over the portal and made a three-point landing on my puss.

It knocked me groggy for a minute. That's the main reason why, when I staggered to my feet, I went panicky over what I saw. I took one horrified look around me, then made a flying tackle for the only substantial thing in a cockeyed universe—the chandelier a few feet before me.

I wrapped my arms around this and held on for dear life. I guess I must have yelled, too. If I didn't, someone else must have been squawking.

"Jack! For God's sake get me down out of here!"

Then Jack's size twelves were beside my nose, and he was lifting me up, saying:

"Take it easy, guy. It's all right."

All right! All I could figure was that either I had suddenly become drunk, or that the world had gone haywire, or that Congress, in secret session, had repealed the Law of Gravity. Because the room was upside down! Completely, perfectly, illogically upside down!

The "floor" on which we stood was actually the ceiling. It was neatly papered to match the walls. The room had two windows, and in each of these the curtains were carefully draped skyward. Some pictures on the walls were topsy-turvy, the light fixtures were reversed.

And up above— Well, if you want to know what it looked like, stop reading this and stare at your ceiling. Try to imagine you're up there looking down. Get it? That's what the furniture looked like to me. I hollered again and grabbed at Jack, ducking out from under a divan that looked like any second it would drop and smack me on the conk.

Then came the killer-diller. The same voice that had asked us to come in now spoke again, this time somewhat petulantly.

"John, what's the matter with your friend? Is he intoxicated?"

I looked up. There, calmly seated in one of those upside-down chairs, staring down at me with an expression of mild annoyance, was a chubby, pink-cheeked elderly gentleman in dressing gown and carpet slippers.

Jack said, "Uncle Herman, this is Bill Harkness, my friend. He runs horses. He's spending the weekend with us."

Uncle Herman said, "Well, he doesn't have to be so noisy about it, does he?"

But he rose and took three steps across the floor—I mean the ceiling—no, I mean the floor—oh, to hell with it! Then, gravely, he leaned down and shook my hand.

For an instant I had a sensation of curious lightness. I didn't know whether he was going to pull me up with him, or whether I was going to drag him down to my level. But nothing happened. And then Jack said:

"Bill heard you walking around, Uncle. He couldn't understand it. So, knowing you were still up, I thought I'd bring him down to meet you."

UNCLE HERMAN nodded, beaming. "Quite right, John. Very thoughtful of you."

He smiled at me. I guess it was a smile. From my angle, the corners of his mouth turned down instead of up. He said, almost proudly:

"I suppose you are wondering about—all this?"

I was indeed. I was wondering about a room which

had on its ceiling chairs, tables, bookcases, divans—all carefully bolted and fastened. More particularly, I was wondering about a man who could live in such a room.

I said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to know how the—I mean, what causes—"

"To be honest," confessed Uncle Herman, "I don't know myself. That is, not yet. However, I've been working hard on the problem, and have several theories." He nodded toward his bookcase. "You see, it all began about three or four months ago. Until then, I was just the same as other men. Wasn't I, John?"

"Hm-m," said Jack.

Uncle Herman folded his newspaper loosely, laid it on his knee. Instantly it cascaded toward the floor. I grabbed it and handed it back to him. This time he tucked it into his bookcase.

"Thank you, Harkness. As I was saying, it began about four months ago. I was doing some research in my laboratory — I am, or was, an experimental chemist, you know—when suddenly I experienced a strange, lifting sensation. I distinctly felt my feet move a few inches off the floor.

"In a few seconds the feeling passed. Naturally I said nothing about it to my associates. I assumed it to be merely a giddy spell, a moment of vertigo. But a few days later—"

"Yes?" I said.

"A few days later, while having dinner at a downtown restaurant, it happened again. This time I floated a full twelve inches off the floor. It was only by exerting a strenuous effort that I succeeded in pulling myself down.

"In the course of this—er—unfortunate incident, I upset a glass of water. Thus I attracted some attention to myself. I assure you, it was most embarrassing. Most!"

He looked at me as if expecting some comment. But I said nothing. How the hell can you tell a guy you're sorry he's a human blimp?

Uncle Herman shrugged and continued. "The restaurant incident caused me some alarm. I visited a physician, who assured me I was in perfect health. But at his office, during the examination, I discovered one other peculiar fact. My weight. I weighed only one twenty-four!"

I said, "One twenty-four? But surely, sir—"

Uncle Herman beamed. "I know. I look much heavier, don't I? My build is that of a man of one-seventy-eight; which, in fact, was my weight before this—er—all began.

"But apparently some strange chemical reaction, possibly the result of my experiments, had assumed control of my body. For as the weeks passed, I experienced with increasing regularity these spells of 'falling upward'. And after each spasm, I found that I had lost a little more weight! I dropped to ninety-three, then to seventy, to thirty-one. Until, finally—"

"But, sir!" I interrupted. "That's impossible!

Why, your bones alone would weigh more than that!"

"Until finally," continued Uncle Herman imper- turbably, "I attained my present weight. Which, for some weeks now, has remained static. And that weight is—*minus twelve!*"

I ROSE. I must have looked sort of grim. I was fed up with this nonsense and more than a little bit sore at both Jack and his precious "Uncle Herman." How they had devised and accomplished this trick, I had no idea. But I knew it *was* a gag. Clever, yes—but a trick. And a dirty one. Robbing a guy of a night's sleep—

I said, "Well, thanks for the bedtime story, boys. Now, if you'll excuse me—"

Jack looked at Uncle Herman and said, regretfully: "I'm sorry, Uncle. I thought he'd understand."

Uncle Herman looked none too pleased. "I wish you would select your friends from the more intelligent—" He sighed. "Oh, well. I'll show him, if you wish."

I said, "Show me what? What's the next act?" and reached for a cigarette.

Jack stopped me. He said, "If you don't mind, Bill—Uncle detests the odor of tobacco smoke."

So I shoved the fag back in my pocket and Jack disappeared. When he returned he was lugging the bathroom scales. He put them on the floor—our floor, you know, not Uncle Herman's. And he reached up a hand to Uncle Herman.

"All right, Uncle," he said.

Uncle Herman said, "The weight first, John."

"Oh, yes." Jack disappeared again. This time he brought back a big weight, the kind they use in warehouses.

He said, "Look, Bill!" and placed it on the scales. The dial spun to read "20."

I said, "Ta-da-*daaah!* So it weighs twenty pounds. So what?"

"Well," said Jack, "here's what. Ready, Uncle?"

He handed Uncle Herman the weight. Immediately the chubby little man began floating floorward, turning as he came down. He landed, puffing slightly, on his feet before me. I saw then that he wasn't a tall man; just an ordinary, friendly looking little old Dutchman. He was holding on to the twenty-pound weight for dear life.

He said, "I believe this will convince you, Mr. Harkness, that my story is no exaggeration—"

And he stepped onto the scales.

I took one look, then gulped. Then I looked again and gulped some more. Because the dial of that instrument hovered, despite the twenty-pound weight and the additional weight of Uncle Herman, at the figure "8"!

I said, "Hey! But that's impossible! Nobody can weigh less than—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Uncle Herman pleasantly. "I can. As a matter of fact, I do. Here, John."

He handed back the weight, and immediately floated

ceilingward again, somersaulting very capably as he went so that he was finally upside down to us again. His voice continued as rationally as if everything were quite in order.

"You see, there are several possible theories to explain my—er—peculiarity.

"As I told you, this unusual trait first manifested itself as a result of some chemical experiments I was conducting. Unfortunately I have no idea just which experiment was responsible for my—er—change.

HE paused a moment. "I had made several small experiments on the day in question. One involved a study of lighter-than-air gases, another had to do with magnetic inductions, a third was concerned with the isolation of neutronium particles.

"It is possible that I in some way counter-magnetized myself against the attraction of Mother Earth. As you undoubtedly know, Earth is a strongly charged electronic particle in the macrocosmos. Einstein* has shown us that electricity, magnetism and gravitation are three manifestations of one underlying principle. Therefore it is possible that I received a charge opposite that of Earth's polarity—you understand?"

"No," I said.

He sighed. "Well, there is another possible explanation. It may be that in some way, one of the chemicals I was dabbling with acted as a catalyst, altering the chemical structure of my body—perhaps I should say the ionic structure—so that the atoms which are a part of me became neutronium atoms."

"New—new what?" I asked him.

"Neutronium. A—er—fearfully heavy condensation of matter. You see, if by some necromancy my bodily atoms had been converted into neutronium, I would have a potential weight equal to that of Earth, despite my lesser mass. In other words, my gravitation would counterbalance that of the Earth itself. I would weigh—"

"Wait a minute," I gasped. "You mean you'd actually weigh as much as the Earth?"

"A trifle more. I would weigh, in round figures, six thousand million, million, million tons and—er—twelve pounds."

I glared at him, but he didn't even crack a smile. The little twerp was serious about all this! I said, sort of hoarselike, I guess.

"And the third possibility?"

He smiled beatifically. "Now we come to the most likely of all. It is my honest belief that in some unusual fashion, the nitrogen elements of my physique have been superseded by elements of helium—thus making me considerably lighter than air! I have not yet been able to prove this to my own satisfaction. Nitrogen only accounts for two and one-half percent of the human body. It would seem that—"

"It would seem that," I interrupted him dizzily, "I lost track of what you're talking about a half hour ago! If it's all the same to you, I think I'll go back to bed."

So I did. And this time, leaving the room, I was careful to step over the sill as I went out.

I DIDN'T sleep very well that night. I finally got to bye-bye land about three-thirty, but even there I had no release from the tormenting thoughts Uncle Herman's tale had inspired. I dreamed all night that I was falling into the sky, grabbing at treetops and mountain peaks as I soared starward. And even my unconscious was wondering what Jack had meant by saying that he had my way out. He hadn't told me yet, and I had been too dizzy to ask. Just that damned mysterious smile lingering on his good-natured face . . . and there was Printer's Ink running fourth, fifth . . . lingering on his good-natured face and now it was merging with a lunar crater that was coming up to swallow me whole.

"Jack!" I was yelling, suddenly, sitting up in bed.

He came running down the hall, his robe half off. "Told you not to eat so fast," he said, sleepily. "Indigestion?"

"Only mental," I said. The sweat was running down me. "Listen, if you don't come out with an answer or two, I'm going to leave here in the morning for a sanitarium."

"I know a good one," he answered. "Specializes in horse players." He yawned and sat down on my bed. "Here, wipe that honest perspiration off your brow. Now then, the trouble with you is that impost, isn't it?"

"Oh-h-h," I groaned, "that impost. A hundred and twenty-six pounds. Damn those stewards."

"Let me get it straight again. They put that impost on, which means that your horse has to carry 126 pounds, either in the jockey's weight, or in some other additional weight to reach that figure?"

I nodded, dully.

"Ever think what Uncle Herman could do to weight requirements?" said Jack, idly.

It was as if somebody had jabbed me with a live wire. "What?" I screamed. "Do you mean—"

"Take it easy," said Jack, sitting down on me. "No, Uncle Herman can't ride. I said take it easy. Let me finish. I said I had the way out, though, remember? Way: w-e-i-g-h," he spelled, laughing. "I've worked out the most sensational gag you ever heard. See how you like it."

Still sitting on me, and I confess it was necessary, he outlined his idea to me. When he finished I had a fever. "It can't work," I said, almost crying. "It's fantastic. It can't possibly—"

"You still don't know Uncle Herman," Jack said, gravely, with that lousy twinkle coming back to his eyes. "In the morning, we'll ask Uncle Herman if he'll play with us. He's a nice egg."

Nice? He was wonderful. I didn't sleep any more

*A refugee from Nazi Germany, Dr. Albert Einstein, discoverer of the theory of relativity, is now living in Princeton, N. J., where he is a member of the Institute for Advanced Study.—Ed.

that night, if you want to quibble and call what had happened to me before, sleep. But in the morning we all had a short talk. And then we made plans.

YOU know the Gold Stakes. It's the second richest race in the United States. \$75,000 added. Limited to those thoroughbreds selected by the Stakes Committee as the "outstanding racers of the year."

My horse, Printer's Ink, was one of the invitees by virtue of victories in the Rose Challenge, and at Narragansett and Churchill Downs. The other dangerous entries were Freda, the gallant filly who had won the Pimlico Special, and Jolly Tar, victor at Saratoga and the Flamingo.

The trouble was the handicapping of the stewards. The filly, Freda, had been assigned only 112 pounds. Jolly Tar had been imposed with 120. And here I was — or rather here Printer's Ink was — spotted against the finest field in horsedom with a top weight of 126!

That in itself was enough to lengthen odds against him. When we reached the track the afternoon of the big race, the pari-mutuel boards told the story. The public had established Jolly Tar as the favorite at 3 to 2. Freda was 5 to 2. And Printer's Ink was barely ahead of the ruck with a wager rating of 4 to 1.

Uncle Herman, who was sitting in the back seat of our car, bundled in an overcoat the pockets of which we had loaded with shot to keep him stable, glanced at the boards and cluck-clucked.

"Dear me, Harkness! It doesn't look as if your horse is strongly favored."

"Why should he be?" I asked. "He's carrying a top load. But we'll fix that! Let's go to the weighing room."

We found the Committee sitting in judgment on the jockeys soon to ride in the big race. My boy, little Teddy Symes, saw me and came over disconsolately.

"I've weighed in, Mr. Harkness. I tipped the scales at one hundred, so I've got to carry twenty-six pounds on the side." He was far from happy about it. "They shouldn't oughta do us like this. Geez—"

"It's okay, Teddy," I told him. "We're winning."

I went to the table just as a burst of cheering from outside told that the fourth race had ended, that the Stakes was to begin within a few minutes.

I said, "Well, gentlemen, you are quite satisfied with my jockey?"

The chairman nodded. "Quite, Mr. Harkness. I'm sorry we found it necessary to burden Printer's Ink with so great an impost, but—"

"Oh, that!" I grinned and waved a hand in what I hoped was an airy fashion. "Think nothing of it. Matter of fact, you didn't give Printer's Ink *enough* weight to keep him from winning. You underestimate my horse, gentlemen. He's a real champion!"

That staggered 'em. Stewards are accustomed to being bawled out by owners, not praised. They cheered up. I continued:

"By the way, there's nothing in the rule book to prevent a horse from carrying *more* than his assigned weight, is there?"

They stared at me. Finally the chairman said:

"I—er—I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Harkness."

"I mean, it is my privilege to let my horse carry a double weight if I want to, isn't it?"

THEY all looked nervous. One of them started leafing through the code book hastily. He spoke for the entire Committee.

"There's nothing against it, no. But why should you—"

"Call it just a whim," I said. "Coupled with a desire to prove to the public what a really great horse Printer's Ink is. Very well, then. You may wish to make the announcement that Printer's Ink will carry, in addition to his regular jockey, a *second* rider. Uncle Herman, here."

They looked at Uncle Herman, chubby, pink-cheeked, smiling, an obviously middle-aged and obviously heavy man. Then they looked at me. The chairman's face darkened.

He said stiffly, "My dear Harkness, if you think this is funny, if you're trying to turn the Stakes into a comedy—"

"Far from it!" I said. "I believe I'm within my rights, gentlemen. Come on, Jack. Come on, Uncle Herman."

Uncle Herman had no right in the tackroom. So we met the horses as they marched through the chute toward the track. There we stopped Teddy Symes, and to his great amazement I told him to move up and make room for Uncle Herman.

The kid's eyes almost popped out. He wailed:

"But, Mr. Harkness!"

"You do as I say," I told him, "and everything will be okey-doke. Okay, Uncle Herman—off with the overcoat. Up you go!"

He dropped the lead-weighted coat and zipped onto the rump of Printer's Ink. A couple of handlers standing nearby gasped. Uncle Herman wobbled. For a minute I thought he was going to lose his grip and float right on up to the flagpole. Jack grabbed his leg quickly.

"Hold on tight, Uncle Herman. Don't let go of the jockey; not even for a second."

"All right, boys," grinned Uncle Herman.

Honest, he was having the time of his life. Teddy Symes still looked as bewildered as a cross-eyed drunk in a mirror maze, but he was a good jockey. He had felt—even though he could not explain it—the sudden lifting of weight from Printer's Inks' back, as Uncle Herman hoisted.

And then the bugle blew "Boots and Saddles" and the public address system blared the announcement of the richest race in the East, and the horses moved toward the barrier. And I grabbed Jack and started running.

(Concluded on Page 69)

The Man Who Weighed Minus Twelve
(Concluded from page 53)

"Come on!" I yelled. "The odds will be going up like a skyrocket, and I want plenty of 'em!"

I was six hundred percent right. The public took one look at Printer's Ink out there carrying double jockeys, then surged like one man for the betting windows. Those who had bet on Printer's Ink were frantically covering their wagers with equal amounts on Freda or Jolly Tar. Those who had backed the other two favorites were increasing the size of their bets.

In sixty seconds the odds on Printer's Ink were up to 7-1. In another minute the machines were offering 11-1, and no takers!

Except us! Jack was in for fifteen C's of his own and an extra five of Uncle Herman's; I was in hock for every last cent I had, twenty-five hundred simoleons. Baby! And at an average of 10-1!

IT'S a shame to tell the next part. After all the build-up, it should be one of those thrillers you read about. Like, "At the quarterpole it was Freda and Jolly Tar neck and neck. At the half the outsider, Frenzy, led by a nose. Thundering down the stretch it was Freda and Printer's Ink—"

But it wasn't anything like that. Printer's Ink was a good horse. More than that, he was a great horse.

Even with a full 126-pound impost he would have had more than a fighting chance to win—but with Uncle Herman astride his rear quarters, hanging on to Teddy Symes for dear life, adding his minus-twelve weight to the race—

Well, at the quarterpost Printer's Ink led by two lengths. It was four at the half, six at the three-quarters. Coming into the stretch Jolly Tar made a bid. It was a good bid. It was so good that when they crossed the finish line Printer's Ink led by only five lengths. Jolly Tar was second, and an outsider, Laughing Girl, came in to show. Freda was way back in the ruck, probably nursing a broken heart.

Then everything was bedlam. The crowd went stark, staring mad, of course. While a radio announcer yammered incoherent sentences of praise into his mike, the mob burst through the barriers and out onto the track to surround this magnificent horse which, carrying two riders, had showed clean heels to the best thoroughbreds in the nation.

At the head of that mob were Jack and I. Jack had the all-important overcoat flung over his arm. We reached Printer's Ink first, tossed the coat up to Uncle Herman. As soon as he put it on, Printer's Ink sagged a little, but no one noticed that in the excitement.

Reporters were crowding us, demanding Uncle Herman's name; asking why we had chosen to pull this spectacular stunt; asking a million other questions. Cameramen were clicking shutters, popping flashbulbs like firecrackers. A handler was trying vainly to lead Printer's Ink to the winner's circle.

I whispered swiftly into Jack's ear. "Get Uncle Herman out of here before somebody get hep. Here, take these—" I handed him the handful of tickets I'd bought on Printer's Ink. "And change 'em for mazuma. As soon as the excitement's over I'll join you."

Then Tippy Malone, a camera hound from International Press whom I had known for years, struggled through the mob, grabbed my arm beseechingly.

"Bill, for gosh sakes, gimme a break! Some damned fool busted all my bulbs and I didn't get a single picture. I had to dig this old flash unit out of my kit. Please—"

I said, "I'm sorry, Tippy, but—"

"You've got to, Bill! This is the biggest sensation since Upset beat Man-o'-War. If I don't get a picture I'll be fired!"

I said, "Well, all right then. But make it snappy. Uncle Herman!"

He took his pose; not on the horse, but standing beside Printer's Ink, pudgy and smiling in his heavy overcoat. He stroked the horse's nose. Tippy poured powder in his old-fashioned pan, set the box.

"All right. Smile. Now!"

A streak of white flame flared. Everybody blinked. There was a sudden wailing bleat.

"Wait a miiinnn—"

Then it died off into the distance, and there came a hollow, puffing sound—a pint-sized burst of thunder from our very midst! Printer's Ink neighed and bolted. The mob howled. Tippy looked up from his box, scowling. He said:

"Hey, where the hell did he go? That's a fine way to treat an old pal, Bill! Tell him to come back!"

But Uncle Herman hasn't come back yet. His room, that elaborate upside-down room in Jack's house, is still waiting for him. His pipe is there, his carpet slippers and dressing gown. And a pile of banknotes that he won riding Printer's Ink to victory.

But Uncle Herman hasn't come back. We don't know exactly why. Or how he disappeared. Tippy Malone showed us the picture he snapped just as Uncle Herman disappeared in a wailing bleat. It doesn't make sense. It shows Uncle Herman, overcoat and all, surrounded by a filmy halo, scooting hell-bent-for-election skyward with something that looks like streamers shooting from his mouth, ears and nostrils.

Jack says maybe the excitement caused still another chemical change in Uncle Herman; that his weight diminished to the point where even lead weights wouldn't hold him down. I have another thought.

Maybe I'm wrong. I have a sneaking hunch that Uncle Herman's reason for being lighter than air was not that he was filled with helium, but that he was loaded to the gills with *hydrogen*! And—well, you know what happened to the *Hindenburg*. And Tippy Malone's old-fashioned flash box emitted a spark—

Anyhow, Uncle Herman hasn't come back yet. We are still waiting and hoping. So keep in touch with me. I'll let you know if we hear from him. . . .