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A Complete Novel

THE MULTILLIONTH CHANCE

By JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

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Read Our Companion Science Fiction Magazine—STARTLING STORIES

Tubby seized the cleaver and raised it over his head



Tubby—Master of the Atom

By RAY CUMMINGS

Off goes Tubby in the Time-Space-Matter-Mobile on a jaunt to a distant era where an atomic beauty gives him the eye!

TUBBY was excited at the very thought of this atomic lecture he was about to hear.

"Maybe he'll explode an atom for us," he whispered. "Think so? Just one, maybe?"

"You're raving," Jake said. "If even one atom explodes, it blows you all to pieces."

"That's right," Pete declared.

The little lecture hall was crowded. Tubby and his two friends had come early, to be sure

of good seats. Now they were seated comfortably in the first row. The place had filled quickly. When there were no more regular seats, the ushers had opened little camp-chairs. There were a few feet of empty space between the first row and the raised lecture platform.

That was too bad for Tubby because, presently, an usher came escorting what seemed to be favored personages—two baldheaded

little men, and a young woman.

The usher obsequiously placed the chairs on a diagonal partly in front of Tubby and his friends. The young woman had a weird-looking black hat with a feather and flower on it. She was very animated, whispering to her aged companions, so that in about a minute Tubby was dizzy trying to duck the bobbing feather and flower.

"Well!" he exploded audibly. "Some people just ain't got no consideration at all!"

The young woman turned. Tubby hadn't noticed her much before. He had been too busy gazing at the hat. He saw now that she was a slim and slinky girl in black, with a face that nobody could complain about. Her parted red lips were smiling, and the ravishing look of big, luminous dark eyes that she bestowed on Tubby made his head swim.

"Oh, I'm sorry," the young woman said. "My hat, of course!" She removed it and turned back to waste her charm on the two weazened little men.

"S'all right," Tubby murmured. "Thanks, you needn't have bothered."

"Sh-h-h!" Jake hissed. "Shut up! He's bargainin'."

A pale young man in black evening clothes complete with tails, boiled shirt and high collar, had appeared on the platform. His voice was soft and very pleasant. Soothing. He was sort of hypnotic, Tubby thought. But if you listened close to what he was saying, it was the real McCoy. Gave you plenty to think about.

"Now the uranium atom is the most complex of all atoms," the lecturer was saying. "It has in it ninety-two electrons. Each of them has a charge of negative electricity, and they spin in orbits around a tiny, but heavy nucleus. And this nucleus is made up of ninety-two positively charged protons plus one hundred forty-six neutrons, which are electrically neutral. This atom we call U-Two-thirty-eight. That is, ninety-two plus one-forty-six which equals two-thirty-eight. Now in order to split that atom and thus release an enormous amount of energy, we add to the nucleus a slow-moving neutron produced with the aid of radium or a cyclotron. . ."

DEEP stuff this. Tubby wedged his fat little body down more comfortably in his chair. The lecturer droned on:

"Now the mechanism of an atomic bomb, for instance, by which a slow-moving neutron strikes the atom, consists of—"

A twitch at his coat sleeve made Tubby turn. A man was standing beside him in the aisle—a thin, bent little man with a big wobbling head and a mass of iron-gray hair. He had a felt hat in his hand. His fingers were crushing it in suppressed excitement.

"You're Tubby?" the little man whispered. "I've been looking all over for you. Come on. Quick, now!"

Tubby was startled. "Come on where? Why? Is somethin' wrong?"

"Things are very right," the little man murmured. "Now that I've found you—very right indeed. But hurry!"

Before he really realized it, Tubby was in the aisle and the stranger was guiding him to a side exit. In the dim hall no one saw them leave.

"Hey, wait a minute, where we goin'?" Tubby asked.

It was drizzling out; much too disagreeable to roam around. The little man turned up the frayed collar of his dark coat and pulled his hat-brim down over his eyes.

"We're going to my chemical laboratory," he answered briskly. "My! I'm glad I found you, Tubby."

"Me, too," Tubby said. A gentleman is always polite. "Glad to meet you, Mr.—er—"

"I'm Professor Ikon," the little man said. He turned his thin, seamed face toward Tubby, and beamed. His features wrinkled up into a knot and his scraggly teeth showed.

"Oh, well, glad to meet you," Tubby acknowledged.

Professor Ikon looked disappointed. "You've never heard of me! Well, I suppose that's the best I could expect. That's just the trouble. Almost no one has ever heard of me. But that's what I'm going to fix. Right now! And you're going to help me! You and I, Tubby. We're going to be the best known people in the world. And the most powerful!"

It sounded fine, but Tubby had no chance to go into it further just then because the Professor suddenly turned into a dark entryway and began fumbling with a key. The door opened.

"Come in, Tubby. Take your coat off and roll up your sleeves. I'll have everything ready in a minute."

This Professor Ikon was a man of action. Tubby flung off his coat and rolled up his sleeves ready for business. The Professor switched on a light and began bustling about. It was a small, dingy room crowded with

queer-looking apparatus. Wall shelves held big bottles of colored liquid and what looked like radio tubes and grids and flashlight batteries. Everything was electrical, with wires lying around like dead snakes.

The Professor knelt down in the middle of the floor where what looked like a small canoe of white aluminum was standing. The canoe glowed with a luminous electrical light. Then the Professor turned off a switch and the glow died out.

"Fine!" he said. "Everything is ready." He gestured toward the canoe as he stood up. "There, you see? It will hold us two comfortably, though I guess it will be a little crowded, coming back with three."

"Comin' back?" Tubby echoed. "Where we goin'? And why?" Caution is always the better part of valor. "Ain't you rushin' me, Professor? Let's take a minute an' get things straight."

"A minute!" the Professor said. "Why, I've taken all my life, Tubby, in studying this thing, working on it. I'm ready now, at last. But if you insist on technicalities, I'll explain."

He did. Tubby listened, open mouthed.

It was a thrilling project. The Professor had seen a girl—she was extraordinarily far away, but still he had seen her—not once, but many times, for several years now.

"I am able to see her, with what I call my 'Time-Ocularscope,'" Professor Ikon explained. "I remember I was roaming with my vision back and forth through Time. The future, the past, all the myriad Time-worlds. And then, quite by accident, I spied her."

The little Professor sighed, and his far-away look was so rapt that Tubby realized this must be a very remarkable girl indeed.

"A good looker?" Tubby demanded.

"The best. The very best, Tubby. Her eyes particularly." Professor Ikon sighed again. "That gaze of hers! So beautiful, so compelling. It has made her Princess of her world. Its Supreme Ruler."

EVIDENTLY a remarkable situation in this strange, distant world had developed. The Professor quite obviously understood it thoroughly, through years of studying it with his Time-Ocularscope. By the very power of her beauty and flashing gaze, this Princess had made everyone in her world bow to her will.

"Like hypnotizin' 'em," Tubby suggested. "Am I right?"

"Yes. Right. That is, you could call it hypnotism, if you wish," Professor Ikon admitted. "Though it's a bit more scientific than that. I needn't go into all the technicalities."

"Because she's a swell-looker, and that's the most important thing," Tubby agreed. "Okay. Rig up your—whatever that was you called it—and let's see her."

"But we can do better than that, Tubby." The Professor's weazened face was flushed. He was trembling all over with excitement. "My Time-Space-Matter-Mobile will take us to her. I've worked years on it now—all the best years of my life, and it's ready." His gaze was on the small, canoe-shaped aluminum vehicle.

"That?" Tubby murmured. It looked like a precarious thing to travel in.

"That's it," Professor Ikon admitted tenderly. "And now, since it's ready, why waste effort just looking at the Great Princess when we can hop in and go to her?"

The logic of his reasoning was perfectly sound.

"Right," Tubby agreed.

In his eagerness, the little Professor already was starting to shove Tubby in. But it occurred to Tubby that he didn't yet have all the facts concerning this thing.

"Just a second, Professor," he said. "What did you mean? You said you and I are gonna get to rule the earth and be the best known and the most powerful people in the whole world. We'd be the richest too, maybe, huh?"

"We will, Tubby! Of course! The richest men on earth, because we'll control everything and everybody. We'll bend everybody to our will."

"Make 'em do what we say? Am I right?"

"That's it, exactly."

"But how we gonna do it?" Tubby demanded practically. One should have a definite plan, especially in such a big project. "And this Princess? What's she got to do with it?"

"Everything, Tubby. Absolutely everything."

It was a very neat and tricky plan which the Professor had worked out. They would go now and bring the Princess back with them. When they had her here, she would master everyone here on earth, by the strange and intricately-scientific power of her gaze, just as she had in her own world.

It sounded quite a lot of mastering for one lone girl to do, no matter how good a looker

she was, but Professor Ikon was very confident about her powers.

"Believe me, Tubby, she can do it," he declared earnestly. "I've seen her do marvels in her own world." Ikon's expression was awed. "I don't need to bother you with the technical science of it. How she does it all is quite technical. But I understand it, Tubby, and if you insist, I'll explain."

"S'quite okay," Tubby agreed. "If you've really seen her perform, okay!"

"I did. I saw her quell a rebellion. That was two years ago."

So they would bring the Princess here, and she would make everybody in the world obey her. That was fine, but still Tubby could detect a flaw in the scheme.

"She'll boss everybody," Tubby said. "But who'll boss her?"

"You will," the little professor said triumphantly. "That's why I need you to go with me."

"Me?" Tubby said.

"Of course. Why, I've heard of you for years, Tubby. You'll charm her—master her."

"Will I?"

"Of course you will. The things I've heard about you handling girls are marvelous. That's why I wanted to find you tonight. I had to find you. See?"

"Well, I do get along with girls pretty good," Tubby said modestly.

"I know you do. And when you really put your mind to it, with such gigantic issues at stake, it'll be a push-over."

After all, the Professor's argument was irrefutable. Tubby thumped his chest.

"Okay, Professor. Let's go."

The little Time-Space-Matter-Mobile was pretty narrow, but Tubby wedged himself down into its bottom, with the Professor sprawled beside him. For such a small vehicle, there were certainly a lot of mechanisms—wires, batteries, and dials. A panel of dials, like about a hundred tiny clock-faces, was up in the bow where Professor Ikon was crouching.

"Now, hold still, Tubby." The Professor's voice was trembling with emotion. This was certainly a big moment for him, after all his years of work. "Don't move now. I'll adjust the electrodes on you."

IT SOUNDED bad, but Tubby held himself motionless while the Professor fitted an aluminum cap to his head, with wires down

to his wrists and ankles, clamped there with metal bracelets. There was also a collar and belt which went around Tubby, too. Then Professor Ikon fitted himself up in the same way.

"And we have a third apparatus for her," Professor Ikon said. "You see, I've thought of everything. Now! Brace yourself, Tubby. I'll start us."

The little Professor's fingers trembled with eagerness as he fumbled under the inside of the gunwale. Tubby certainly hoped he wouldn't do anything wrong in his excitement.

"Take it easy," he cautioned the scientist. "We ain't in too much of a hurry. Which way do we go? Maybe you better explain to me—"

He had no chance to finish. Professor Ikon had shoved the switch. It was quite a shock. Everything got pretty mixed up and confused for Tubby. The laboratory room swayed dizzily, and then seemed to burst with a soundless explosion. Or was the explosion in Tubby's head? His ears roared. The blinding light was dazzling.

For a minute he couldn't see anything. He just seemed to be swooping around in a big empty abyss.

Where was the Professor? Where was the laboratory room?

The effect was certainly peculiar. Tubby thought maybe he was dead. Then he knew he wasn't, because he could feel himself wedged against the curving sides of the vehicle and his head was steady. Every place he looked brought glimpses of a great, empty void of gray swaying mist.

The little canoe-shaped vehicle seemed to be hanging in the center of it. And now Tubby could see that the gunwale beside him was becoming luminous. When his hand happened to touch it, he discovered that it was warm and throbbing with a rapid, tiny vibration.

The Professor had been knocked out cold. He was sprawled out beside Tubby in a senseless heap. A green phosphorescent glow made him look awful.

At last he stirred, and sat up dizzily.

"Why—why—oh dear!" he murmured, "I must have started us too quickly. Are you all right, Tubby?"

"Sure," Tubby said. "I guess so."

They were in full flight. The luminous hands on all the little dials were stirring. Some of the pointers were whizzing around

so fast Tubby couldn't see them. But everything was all right now. The Professor was triumphant.

"Wonderful, Tubby. We're on our way." He rubbed his palms together in triumph.

"On our way, where?" Tubby demanded. "Listen, Professor, you ain't yet told me just where we're goin'."

"Well, so far, in Space, we haven't moved at all," Professor Ikon explained. "We're just where we started. This is my laboratory room."

"Don't look like it," Tubby said dubiously.

"No, of course I doesn't. Because our movement now is in Time." He consulted his dials. "We've just passed the year of Eighteen-fifty. But of course we're picking up speed pretty fast now."

All the changes of these speeding years were blending together, as Professor Ikon made clear, so that all Tubby could see was a swaying gray abyss.

"We're goin' into the past, right?" Tubby said. "So that's where the girl lives? Right here, but back in the past?"

"Well, yes and no," the Professor said. "You see, Tubby, it's a little more complicated than that. First we go back to the early centuries."

"How far back?" Tubby asked.

"The year Nine Thousand-and-one B.C. That's just roughly speaking, of course. Naturally, I've calculated the exact month, week and day."

It sounded like a long distance. Suddenly Tubby had a startling realization. He was getting hungry, and thirsty.

"I hope you brought somethin' to eat and drink with us, Perfessor," he said. "I ain't seen no food around here yet."

The Professor seemed to have forgotten that little detail. But he covered it up.

"Why—my goodness, I think that is hardly necessary, Tubby. The trip won't take long, not to our consciousness of the passing of time. Why, already we're—" he consulted his dials—"passing Fourteen Ninety-one. Columbus is just getting ready to discover America. Of course we're still moving comparatively slowly. But our acceleration is tremendous. In geometric ratio it's absolutely terrific."

They got back to the year One Thousand, A.D., almost before the Professor realized it, and that wasn't a marker to the speed they'd have presently.

"I think I'd better start moving us in

Space," the scientist said suddenly. "You see, in Space the girl is living at what my calculations show to be Latitude twenty degrees two minutes one second North, and Longitude Eighty degrees, three seconds. That's about Little Cayman Island, south of Cuba. We have to pause there, in Nine Thousand-and-one, B.C. But from then on, we don't go further either in Space or in Time. We stop."

THE Professor had no chance now to explain anything else. He was too busy moving them in Space. He pressed a lot of new levers. Tubby's head whirled again. All he could see was that the gray void around them had started to sway a little more. He could almost imagine it was drifting backward as they slid forward through it, heading for Cuba. The vehicle throbbed a little differently. It glowed now with a reddish tinge.

"Three Thousand, B.C., and we're passing over the Space about Charleston, South Carolina," the Professor announced suddenly.

The little Time-Space-Matter-Mobile was certainly going places in a hurry. Tubby was glad the trip would be brief, because now he was growing very uncomfortable. His wedged body was cramped. He had also begun to realize the sides of the vehicle were getting pretty hot. Worse than that, they were getting hotter every minute, and he could smell the choking odor of chemicals. Something was burning!

"Hey, Perfessor somethin's wrong!" Tubby warned. "You better watch out!"

The Professor also had noticed it.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" He looked frightened and confused, which was bad because Tubby didn't know how to operate this thing. Obviously plenty of action was needed, right now, in a hurry.

"Oh, my! I'm afraid!"

Tubby gripped him. "Brace up, Perfessor! What's gone sour?"

Something had gone very sour indeed. The chemical fumes were getting worse. The gunwale of the vehicle was now so hot Tubby could hardly sit still.

"I must have put on too much speed!" Professor Ikon wailed. "Dear me!"

The little Time-Space-Matter-Mobile was running plenty hot! A million of its tiny, intricate bearings were in danger of burning up.

"Do somethin', Perfessor. Listen, we gotta

act quick."

"Yes. Of course. I'll act. We'll have to land. I—we—I'll land us."

It was certainly a crash landing. The Professor's shaking hands seemed to pull all the switches at once. Tubby heard him mumbling something about the Time of Seven Thousand, B.C. and the Space of mid-Florida, and everything jolted into chaos. The next thing Tubby knew was that he and the Professor must have catapulted out of the vehicle, because now they were lying on a leafy ground. The Professor was trying to sit up.

"Tubby!" he gasped. "Look!"

Tubby got partly to his feet. The little canoe-shaped vehicle was here. It didn't appear to be smashed. A wisp of green-yellow smoke was rising from it and its bow had dug into a leafy, mouldy soil. But otherwise it looked all right. None of that was what the Professor meant. His arm was shakily gesturing.

"Tubby! Oh, my, goodness!"

All around them was a lush, steaming jungle. It was gorgeous. But Tubby had no chance to admire the scenery, because out of it strange things were coming at a run! A ring of them, advancing from everywhere! There were horned brown animals, like giant antelope; lumbering, monstrous alligators, with yawning jaws; and great snakes, like pythons, that slithered along the ground.

In the trees other things scampered, getting ready to leap. All of them were yelling, with every kind of animal voice. And in the air, birds like huge vultures were circling, swooping down! Mid-Florida in the year of Seven Thousand, B.C. quite evidently was a busy place.

And it was the abrupt arrival of the Professor and Tubby which had caused the excitement. Tubby needed only one swift look.

"We gotta get outer here!" he yelled. "Professor, this ain't no place for us."

Plainly it wasn't. All these creatures most certainly were greedily hungry, racing to beat each other to the meal.

Tubby sprang into action. It was nip and tuck. He yanked the Professor into the vehicle, and wedged himself down.

"Get us goin', Professor. Snappy now."

Somehow the still-dazed Professor managed to pull the right levers. Everything lurched; the ring of hungry animal faces and slithering reptiles all seemed to dissolve into grayness. . .

The little Time-Space-Matter-Mobile was on its way again. It had cooled off and again was running sweetly.

"Let's take it kinda slow, eh, Professor?" Tubby suggested. "Don't wanta heat her up again."

EIGHT thousand, B.C. And in Space they were steadily drifting to the designated latitude and longitude.

After a while the Professor commenced slowing up. There was another moment of chaos as they stopped, but compared to the crash landing, it was very easy.

Nine Thousand, B.C. Lat. 20° 2' 1" N. Long. 80° 0' 3" W. So far so good. Tubby took a look around. There was a lot of sand, a stretch of glassy water and, off to one side, the edge of a jungle. It was night, with stars that looked just about as usual.

"Okay," Tubby said. "Where do we go now, Professor? Don't have to stop here long, do we?"

Where they went from there sounded pretty complicated to Tubby, but the Professor assured him that it wasn't.

"We start right away," he said. "This is the right spot, and the right time, but now we have to go into a different material world."

It was like going into the fourth dimension, Professor Ikon explained. A fourth dimensional world of this exact Time and Space.

"You see?" the Professor said. "In a way, you could say we're now going sidewise in Time, since we go neither forward nor backward, but just hold level. We only stopped because I was afraid to turn the corner too quickly."

"We might skid," Tubby agreed.

They were off again in a minute, with the vista of sand and water melting into a dim shifting void. The little vehicle glowed with a dim orange sheen now and emitted a faint humming noise. But the trip was short and the gunwale didn't heat up.

"Now!" the Professor murmured. "Here at last!"

There was quite a nasty jolt, but Tubby kept his wits. The Professor as usual was pretty well knocked out, with his head down on the floor boards and his arms trailing limply. Briskly Tubby sat up. Somebody had to be alert, after that experience in the year of Seven Thousand, B.C.

All was well, but peculiar. The light of this new world consisted of a faint twilight

glow. Ribbons of luminescence flickered up from the rocks. Phosphorescence shimmered in the water of a little lake nearby and glowed in all the branches of the drooping lacy trees.

It was a beautiful, though queer-looking landscape. Outlines were blurred, as if being viewed through water. Distant fields were visible, with the little dark shapes of things growing in them. Overhead arched the sky, like a purple vault, very close, so close that Tubby tried to reach up and touch it, but found that he couldn't.

The Professor once more had come to life. He sat up, felt himself to see if he was all in one piece, and then looked around triumphantly.

"We're here, Tubby. Wonderful! Exactly as I calculated. Look! There's her palace."

He had certainly steered a neat course to their destination. Off to the left, part way up a little rose colored hill, a big, low, shining building stood under the drooping, fantastic red and bluish trees.

Tubby was still wearing the electrodes and wires. He started to take them off, but the scientist stopped him.

"Might as well leave them on, Tubby," Professor Ikon said. "Wait, I'll take along a set for her. We'll go get her and bring her back here." Ikon gathered up the third set of wires and electrodes, and hustled Tubby along a little path that led between tall palm trees to the palace.

It was a daring scheme, this abduction of a Princess, particularly one who was so powerful she ruled her world just with a gesture and a look. Now that the time was at hand, Tubby grew tense with excitement. He gazed around apprehensively, but there was no one else in sight. Everything was deadly quiet.

"Maybe this is the middle of night here," Tubby whispered, as they crept closer to the dim and silent palace.

The Professor chuckled. "Of course it is. That was my plan. I figured everything out, down to the exact second. She'll be asleep. We'll sneak in, wake her up and you'll make her come with us."

Tubby hoped he could.

"Sure, sure," he agreed.

They moved closer.

"There's her window," the Professor murmured. "See it? We'll climb in."

Tubby saw it, a little triangular hole in the flowered red wall of the glowing build-

ing. Big round balls of flowers on long stems swayed to and fro, here in the palace gardens. They were nearly as tall as Tubby. As he and the Professor moved furtively between them, they rustled and stirred as though frightened. The effect was creepy.

"Lookit," Tubby whispered. "Them flowers—they're afraid of us!"

The Professor cast an uneasy glance at them. "They do act queer, don't they?"

QUEER was a mild word for it. Tubby and the Professor had passed through the garden now. Behind them the ball-flowers had shifted so that they were clustered together.

Sounds came from them, tiny, muttering, frightened voices.

They weren't flowers. They were people!

They had little stick-like brown stems of bodies, with branching arms and legs and the round reddish ball at the top which was the head. For an instant they faintly chattered in terror.

Suddenly they all turned and ran, vanishing in the dim red, phosphorescent sheen of the night.

Tubby gasped, but the Professor was relieved.

"Why, I remember now," he whispered. "Those are the workers of this world. And sometimes at night they come to worship outside the Princess' window."

Yet they had run away in terror. Very good. Tubby expanded his ample pudgy chest.

"Scared the daylights out of 'em, eh, Professor?" he said with a chuckle. "If the Princess has any Palace guards around here, I'll handle 'em."

But no guards appeared. There was a loud thump as Tubby climbed through the triangular window and went sprawling flat inside on the floor. The Professor landed upright, but lost his balance and sat down with a force which was hard enough to rattle the electrodes he was carrying.

"Sh-h-h!" Tubby whispered. "Quiet! Don't fall down so loud, Professor."

They crouched there, panting, and listened. But nothing unpleasant happened. The Princess hadn't waked up. She was over there, sleeping peacefully on a mound of rose-colored cushions in the center of the room.

It was a big, perfumed room. Soft-colored drapes of delicate tints hung everywhere in

big folds. Phosphorescent light shimmered on them. Tubby gazed raptly—not at the drapes—but at the sleeping Princess.

The Professor hadn't exaggerated. She was a swell looker. Her shimmering, pale-blue robe showed that she had curves in all the right places, and she was lying gracefully with one pink-white arm crooked under her head. Her hair, shining like fine threads of silver, was spread on the pillow, framing her face. Nobody could want his girl to have a nicer face. But the beauty of this one was somewhat marred, because even now in sleep, the Princess was wearing big dark spectacles, like smoked-lens sun-glasses.

"There she is!" the Professor was murmuring with awe. "Go wake her up, Tubby. Charm her, let her know who's master around here. Hurry now. We want to get her out of this place right away."

He gave Tubby a shove. Waking young ladies up was not exactly in Tubby's line, especially Princesses. But he started forward masterfully. He didn't get very far. Unfortunately Professor Ikon had put the third set of electrodes and wires on the floor. Tubby's feet got tangled. He fell on his face, and by the time he had staggered erect again, the Princess was sitting up in bed, with her silvery hair falling in a mass over her slim shoulders. She was astonished as she stared at Tubby. Next she grew angry. The glasses hid her eyes, which probably were flashing royal wrath. Tubby could tell by the set of her beautiful red lips how annoyed she felt.

"Rumpff!" the Princess said.

Tubby maintained his dignity. He got to his feet and smiled his very best smile.

"Hi-ya Princess," he said. "Pleased to meet you."

"Rumpff, scroppf!" the Princess said.

In a way, it began to look as if this could be tough going. Tubby took another step or two toward her. The Princess didn't act frightened. About the only emotion she was registering was indignation. Her dainty hand made a gesture toward her heavy dark spectacles, but she seemed to change her mind and dropped her hand to the cushion beside her.

"Rumpff, scroppf, ruzzle!" she said in sharp tones.

From across the room, the Professor murmured.

"Oh dear, I forgot she can't understand you, Tubby. Maybe if you try Sanscrit or

Lemurianese, she'd get what you mean."

His voice went into a squeal of terror. It made Tubby turn, just in time to see the rose-colored drapes across the room parting. The Palace guards had arrived!

Tubby gulped and stood staring, numbed. These weren't little men with bodies like flimsy brown sticks. Anything but. In the folds of the wall-drapes a huge, ugly-looking customer stood looming—a scowling, massive, hairy villain about eight feet tall! His naked barrel chest was black with matted hair. His shoulders were wide and thick as a gorilla's. His big-jowled face was scowling. A thing that looked like a huge meat cleaver was in his hand. He brandished it murderously as he rushed at Tubby. Behind him there were other guards, fully as big and as ugly.

"Oh dear!" the Professor squealed. "Oh, my goodness."

The scientist cowered on the floor over by the triangular window and it occurred to Tubby that he might leap to safety through the window, but he was standing so far away the idea wasn't practical. Maybe a good stiff bluff would work.

"Stand where you are, you villain!" Tubby yelled. "You take one step closer and, s'elp me, I'll shoot yuh dead."

BUT the big villain didn't get the idea at all. He kept on coming, with the meat cleaver raised over his head.

"Tubby! Tubby, watch out!" the Professor shrieked.

The Princess was sitting up even more imperiously on her cushions. Again her hand made a gesture toward her spectacles.

"Gruff qumbess dimarko—ruffp," the Princess ordered.

Her command stopped the oncoming hairy scoundrel. He dropped his meat cleaver and stood stiff as though frozen. The other scoundrels behind him cowered back. The meat cleaver hit the floor with a clang, slid and brought up against one of Tubby's feet. His chance!

He stooped, seized the cleaver, raised it over his head and jumped. It was quite a meat cleaver. Its heavy cutting edge struck the first villain square in the middle of the skull. As though he were a statue carved out of soap, the cleaver went down through him, dividing him neatly in half.

For a second, or so, the two halves of him stood balanced, each on its leg, then fell,

with a splintering crash, like glass breaking. "Whiff!" the Princess gasped. She was evidently very much at home with violence. She flung a glance of contempt at the fallen giant, and bestowed on Tubby a smile fairly dripping with admiration.

"Neez," she murmured. "Nickl."

Her hand made a little gesture, beckoning him.

Professor Ikon had recovered himself.

"Wonderful, Tubby! She wants you to sit down by her. Hurry it up. Don't be backward."

Tubby realized it was no time to hesitate. The other guards had slunk away, but more might come. He sat down.

"Sorry if I frightened you, Princess," he said.

What difference did it make what he said, since she couldn't understand him. It was what he did which would count. He touched her arm. "You and me could get along swell maybe?"

"Rickl!" the Princess said. "Sappo ptush."

"The idea is to get outa here," Tubby explained. He made violent gestures toward the Princess, the Professor, himself and the triangle of window. "We're gonna take you away, see?" He gripped one of her hands.

"Sappo," the Princess said again. Her lips were smiling. But Tubby couldn't see her eyes and those miserable dark glasses spoiled her beauty. Tubby impulsively reached for them, yanked them off and tossed them away.

"Let's see what you look like, Princess. You sure are a grand looker and them cheaters ain't becomin'. Not at all."

A gasp from the Princess and a yelp of horror from the Professor cut short his admiring words.

"Tubby! Tubby! Oh my Heavens."

"Sall right, Professor. She ain't mad."

"Tubby—her eyes!" the scientist screamed. "Look out! Her eyes are deadly."

"They're swell." For a second her luscious gaze had swept Tubby. It made him tingle. Flashing, loving, admiring gaze. But the little Professor was trying to climb out the window, squealing with fright.

"Run for your life, Tubby," he howled. "Her eyes are the secret of her power. Her eyes flash neutrons! *Slow-moving neutrons!* Oh, I should have told you!"

Slow-moving neutrons, streaming now

from her flashing eyes! Neutrons that would join the nucleus of the atoms here—and split them, with an enormous release of energy from the fission!

The poor Princess was trying now to cover up her eyes, but it evidently didn't feel too good on her hands. Tiny bursts of light rose from them. In despair she flung an agonized glance across the room after her spectacles.

Too late! A billion tiny explosions went off with pin-points of light everywhere she looked—atoms exploding—one setting off the other. . . .

There was a second, in the midst of that horrible atomic roar, light and heat, when Tubby tried to stagger to his feet. Then a blast of white-hot pressure flung him down again. Frantically he clutched the Princess. She was murmuring with horror, and twitching, pulling away from him. Tubby could also hear scraping sounds, such as chairs being violently moved. Angry voices were murmuring. Faint, distant voices, coming closer, clarifying. . . .

"Oh migosh, Tubby!" It was Jake's voice now. "Leave her be. Are you dotty?"

"Stop him! He's crazy! There were a whole lot of other voices.

Tubby opened his eyes.

It wasn't the Princess he was clutching. It was the handsome, sleek young woman in black with the two little bald-headed men beside her! Tubby discovered that the crowded lecture hall was in an uproar.

He had slumped forward and sidewise, half off his chair and was gripping the handsome young woman vigorously. She had flashed him a luscious, ravishing look with her dark eyes when she took off her hat before the lecture began, but that wasn't the kind of look she was giving him now. This one was a searing flame, devastating as the flash of an atomic bomb!

"Let go of me," she screamed. "You nasty little buttertub!"

Jake grabbed at Tubby. "Leave her be. We gotta get outa here."

"Yeah, that's right," Tubby said.

"Sure have, quick!" Pete agreed. "We gotta get ourselves outa here."

But they didn't have to get themselves out. A whole platoon of ushers came and threw them out through the side exit, into the rain-swept street.