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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating
a scene from "Beyond the Rings of Saturn"

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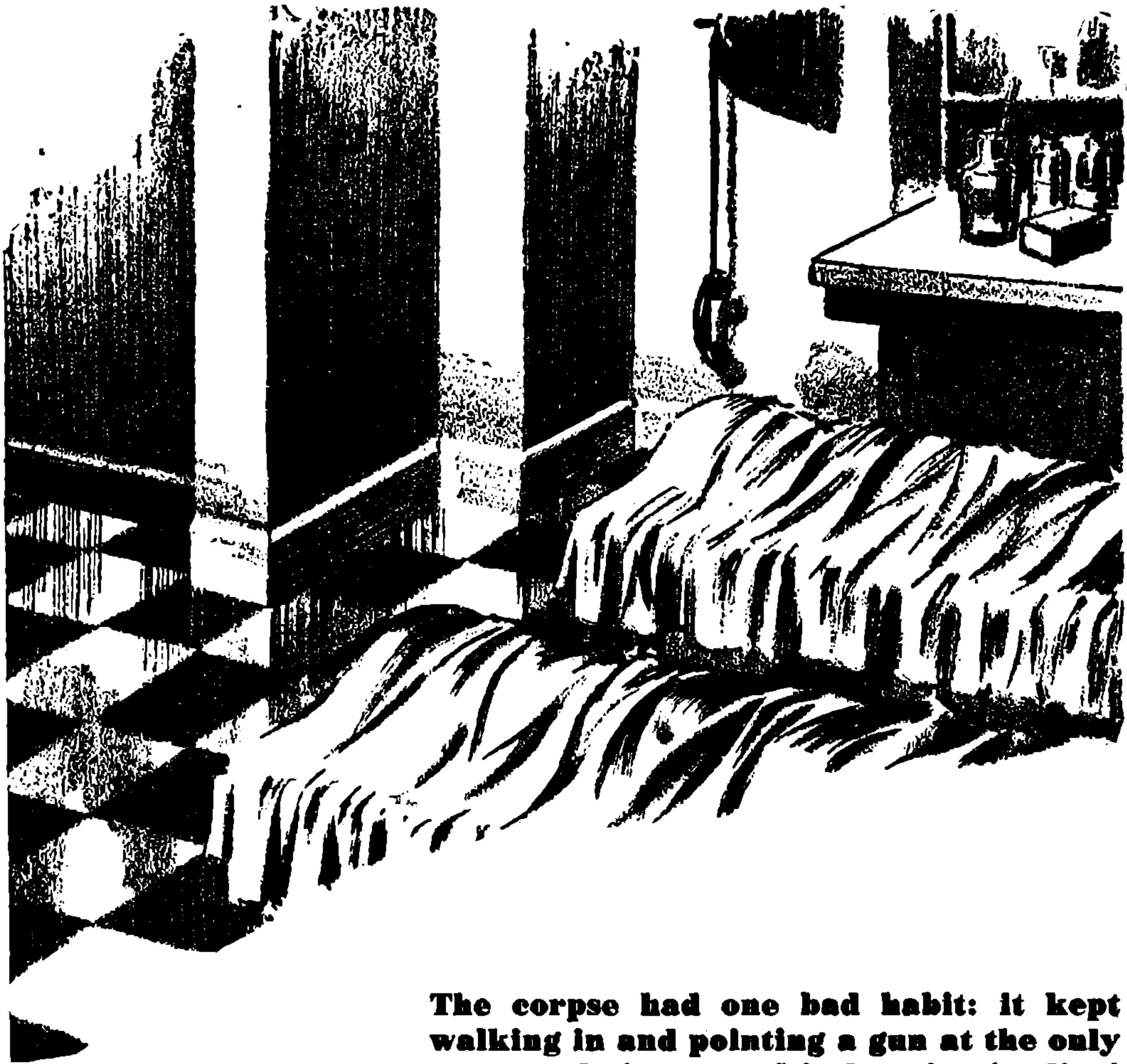
"YOU'LL DIE YESTERDAY!"

By Rog Phillips

At first, in the weak light, he thought he saw the body. But the drawer was empty!



The corpse had one bad habit: it kept walking in and pointing a gun at the only two people interested in keeping it alive!

"THANK YOU," January Stevens said, his voice drowned out by the applause of the audience in the small lecture hall. He turned to leave the platform.

The hall was filled almost to capacity with an audience of quietly dressed men and women. They had come to hear a world-famous author speak on his most recent book, and the attention they had given his words was complete and sincere during the entire two hours.

"Just a moment, Mr. Stevens," the lady chairman said, standing up. The applause stilled. "Perhaps the audience has a few questions to ask. I myself have one." She paused while Jan turned to face her. "What is your next book about? You *are* writing another, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," Jan said. "Of course I might write another sometime; but right now I have no plans in that direction."

"What!" the chairwoman said, smil-

ing. "You write a best seller and aren't making plans to reap the benefits of your fame?" When Jan only smiled she turned to the audience. Any questions? Ah. There's a hand. Yes?"

"Where did you get the idea for your book 'Me and My Robot', Mr. Stevens?" the owner of the hand asked, rising.

"Well, that's hard to say," Jan said. He darted a glance at Paula Morris sitting at the side in the front row, then turned his eyes back to the man. He seemed just an innocent spectator with a vacuous face. "Where *do* ideas come from?" He grinned. There was a ripple of laughter in the audience.

"What I mean is," the man persisted, "did it come from any research work being done at present, by you or by someone you know?"

Jan glanced toward Paula again, frowning uneasily. While his eyes were on her a shot shattered the silence of the auditorium. Jan's eyes swung up in time to see the man who had asked him the questions stiffen, then sag down, dropping out of sight behind a row of chairs.

In the stunned hush that followed a chair overturned at the rear of the hall.

"He did it!" a woman's voice shouted, clutching at a man. The man struck at her with a hand containing a gun. Free of the clutching fingers, he ran to the exit and vanished.

Jan was already off the platform running up the aisle. He reached the exit seconds behind the fleeing gunman. The doorman was coming toward him.

"What happened in there?" the doorman asked. "I thought I heard a shot."

"Did a man just run out this door?" Jan asked hurriedly.

"No," the doorman said.

"He must have," Jan said. "Which way did he go?"

"Nobody came out any doors," the man insisted. "I ought to know. I've been out here all the time."

Jan turned back into the auditorium. A crowd had gathered about the spot where lay the man who had been shot. Jan pushed through and saw Paula bending over him in a hastily cleared area.

"How is he, Paula?" he asked, stooping down beside her.

The man on the floor looked up at Jan, then smiled painfully. "I should have waited to hear what you wanted to tell me," he said, smiling ruefully.

"But you were shot!" Jan said. "How could you—?"

"I didn't mean just now," the man said. "I meant—"

A shudder shook his body. He became still.

"He's dead," Paula whispered, drawing away from the man, her eyes wide.

"Dead?" a scared voice came from the crowd. "Let's get out of here, Emma. I don't want to get mixed up in a murder."

"We've got to find out who he was, Paula," Jan said in a low voice.

He knelt down by the dead man and felt inside his breast pocket, drawing out a leather billfold and some printed sheets.

The doorman was saying, "Everyone has to stay here until the police arrive. I've locked the doors."

Jan and Paula slipped over to a corner by themselves while they inspected their find.

"This's some sort of license," Jan said, coming across a card. He read, "Fred Stone, age—What! A hundred and seven? Expires January seventh, 2163. Wonder what that 'T.T. Permit' means? But of course this is some sort of crazy card. Doesn't mean any-

thing. How could it?"

"What are these printed sheets?" Paula said, taking them from Jan's hand and unfolding them. "Look at this!"

Together they read the heading. "Speech of January Stevens before the Society at their meeting of April 8, 1953."

"Why, Jan!" Paula exclaimed. "That's today!" Her eyes scanned the first few paragraphs. "And it's word for word the speech you just gave."

"I see it is," Jan said. "But it can't be. I didn't prepare my talk. I made it up as I went along, and there's just—" He looked at Paula wide-eyed. "There's nothing except the shorthand notes of the society's secretary. Mrs. Gregory the chairwoman said my speech would be taken down in shorthand and printed in the Society's quarterly bulletin!" He inspected the papers grimly. "I'm going to keep these," he said. "I'll give the police his wallet when they get here."

THE DOOR opened in the darkened room. Lights came on, revealing the room as a well-equipped modern scientific laboratory. Jan closed the door and locked it.

"I've got to conduct some tests on these papers Paula," he said, going over to a table holding several varnished cases. "No use waiting until morning. I couldn't sleep anyway, wondering about them."

He swung open the door on the front of one of the cases, bringing out an instrument resembling a box camera.

"This is one of the things I bought with the royalties from my book," he explained. "Its a commercial development of the Geiger Counter for telling the age of organic compounds. It tells their age by measuring their radio-activity."

He took a pair of headphones from the cabinet and placed them over his ears, plugging the cord into the camera-like box.

"Now," he said. "I take this lead plate to block off emanations from the table, then lay the papers on the lead." He did so, then placed the camera-like box lens down on the papers. "I plug it in now," he said. "Now whenever an atom explodes it makes a click in the earphones. I count the clicks for a minute."

He listened intently while Paula watched. Finally he took off the headphones and placed them over Paula's ears. She listened while he took a booklet from the cabinet and looked at tables.

"Paula," he said, his voice sounding queer. "According to the tables those papers are just two hundred and ten years old."

"Two hundred and ten?" Paula echoed. "But—but that would mean—"

Jan nodded. "It jibes with the expiration date on that card belonging to Fred Stone. It means that he came fom the year 2163, two hundred and ten years in the future. That T. T. permit means time travel."

Paula took off the earphones.

"He came back in Time," Jan said, "carrying the printed copy of my speech about my book, to ask me questions about it. He was killed before he could ask those questions."

"Why?" Paula asked.

"I wish I knew," Jan said. "Was it to keep him from getting the answers to questions he was going to ask—or was it to keep me from learning what questions he was going to ask?"

At the door a man had materialized out of thin air. Jan and Paula, their backs to the door, hadn't seen him. He cautiously unlocked the door and swung it open, then stood in the open-

ing as though he had just entered.

"Put your hands up and get away from that bench," he said abruptly.

At the first sound of his voice Jan and Paula turned, startled. They stared at him and his pointed gun, their eyes widening.

"How did you get in?" Jan demanded. "That door was locked from the inside!"

"Never mind that," the man said. "Step away from that bench so I can get those papers."

Jan looked at the man keenly as he raised his hands and slowly moved away from the bench.

"You're a killer," he said. "I got a good look at you there in the auditorium."

The man grinned at him mirthlessly, then moved warily to the bench, pocketing the papers Jan had been testing.

"What you know won't be believed," he said. "Otherwise I'd be forced to kill both of you. And I'm taking your only proof with me."

He backed toward the exit, jumped through and slammed the door.

Instantly Jan was in motion, running toward the door. He flung it open and looked out. Slowly he came back across the room.

"He was gone," he said. "He must have vanished, because there wasn't time for him to get to the end of the hall."

"Put up your hands," the now familiar voice of the killer sounded from one corner of the room.

Jan and Paula turned in the direction of the voice.

The man advanced toward them cautiously, his gun trained on them.

"Turn around, Stevens," he ordered.

Jan slowly turned, his hands elevated as high as he could get them. The killer's free hand searched Jan's pockets swiftly and expertly.

"What did you do with it?" he demanded, his voice harsh.

"With what?" Jan asked, mystified. "You—"

"Drop that gun, Forbes," a new voice said.

The killer spun around and fired. The man across the room ducked to one side and ran along the wall, trying to get Jan and Paula out of his line of fire. He was wearing a brown uniform with a police badge on his chest.

The killer jumped to the door and flung it open, darting out. The uniformed man ran after him. Jan, lowering his hands, went to the door and looked out. He turned back into the laboratory.

"Gone," he said. "I wonder what he wanted this time? The police got everything except those papers he took." He frowned. "That man in uniform acted like a policeman. He had a badge..."

"I'm getting a headache," Paula said shakily. "Take me home, darling."

THE PHONE rang. Jan carefully lifted the tip of the electric soldering iron from the maze of wires, small radio tubes, condensers, and case-covered units of the electronic device he was putting together.

He crossed the laboratory to the desk. Lifting the telephone receiver, he said, "Hello?"

"Jan!" It was Paula's voice exploding into a note of relief. "I just saw him!"

"The killer?" Jan said excitedly. "Where are you? I'll get the police and come right over."

"No, not the killer," Paula said. "Fred Stone."

"Fred Stone?" Jan echoed. "But you couldn't! He was killed."

"That's who I mean," Paula said. "I just saw him. He was standing on the corner. By the time I could get

to where he was he was gone; but there wasn't any doubt. It was him!"

"Where are you now," Jan asked.

"Downstairs," Paula said. "I'm coming up."

"Wait!" Jan said. "I'll be right down. I want you to show me where you saw Fred Stone."

"No," Paula said. "I think he was looking for the address where your office is. You should stay there in case he calls."

There was a click at the other end. Jan hung up, looked around the laboratory, then went to the door and opened it to look out. He left the door partly ajar and went back to his soldering. A few moments later there were sharp clicks of heels from the hall. Paula came through the door, her eyes bright with excitement.

"Good morning, darling," she said, going up to Jan, placing her hands against his chest, and giving him a light kiss. When Jan tried to kiss her again she evaded him. "Wipe the lipstick off," she said. "You may have callers."

"That's right," Jan said, taking out a handkerchief and rubbing his lips. "But Fred Stone—huh-uh. You must have seen someone that just looks like him."

"I'd swear it was him," Paula said, becoming serious. "Remember, I saw him quite close. I couldn't mistake someone else for him."

"But you didn't see the man on the sidewalk close up?" Jan said.

"N-no." Paula hesitated. "But he was wearing the same clothes. Ordinary business suit, but if you remember it was cut a little peculiarly and a shade of gray I've never seen before. I couldn't be mistaken."

"We'll settle that right now," Jan said, grinning.

He went to the phone. In a few moments he was connected with his party.

"Hello," he said. "Trowbridge? This is Jan Stevens."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Stevens," the voice at the other end said. "I was just going to call you. I'd like for you and Miss Morris to come down to my office. Can you take the time?"

"Of course," Jan said. "We'll be right down. She's here with me. But I wanted to ask you something. Do you still have the body of the man who was shot last night?"

"Of course," Trowbridge said. "Down at the morgue. Why?"

"Are you sure?" Jan asked. "Paula insists that she just saw him down on the corner very much alive."

"What!" Trowbridge's voice barked. There was a brief silence. "On second thought, Stevens, stay where you are. I have something I want you to look at. I'll come over to your laboratory. You and Miss Morris stay there. I won't take long to get there."

"We'll be here," Jan promised. He hung up. "The detective in charge of the murder investigation is coming up," he told Paula.

"He says they still have the corpse in the morgue."

"I don't care," Paula said doggedly. "I'd stake my life that it was the same man."

"There are enough crazy things about this," Jan said. "I think you're wrong—"

The phone rang. Jan picked it up.

"Mr. Stevens," the voice of Trowbridge spoke. "I just checked with the morgue. Don't know why I did. A hunch. It paid off. The corpse is gone."

"Huh?" Jan said, startled.

"You and Miss Morris be down on the sidewalk waiting," Trowbridge went on. "I'll be over as fast as I can get there—which will be about as long as it takes you to get down to the street. I'm bringing men to help

look for Fred Stone."

Jan hung up. He looked at Paula. "The corpse has vanished," he said.

"Then it *was* Fred Stone!" Paula said triumphantly.

Jan shook his head. "Fred Stone was dead," he said positively. "He couldn't come back to life." He was taking off his laboratory apron. "Trowbridge wants us to meet him down in front of the building right away. He's going to try to find Fred Stone—or whoever it was you saw."

He tossed the apron on a lab bench. They went out, slamming the door.

THE DOOR opened again in twenty minutes. Paula came into the lab, followed by a man with wide shoulders and angular jaws. Trowbridge. Jan followed, closing the door.

"If he's still in the neighborhood," Trowbridge was saying, "the men I've got staked out will see him."

Personally I think Paula was mistaken," Jan said. "That man, Fred Stone, was dead. It couldn't be him."

"That's what the coroner says too," Trowbridge said, "but the corpse is missing. It was either stolen right out of the morgue or it got up and walked out." He studied Jan quietly for a moment. "How about telling me the truth, Mr. Stevens?" he asked quietly.

"What do you mean?" Jan asked uneasily.

"For one thing," Trowbridge said, "you claimed you had never seen Fred Stone before last night when he stood up in the audience to ask you a question. But three people swear that the last words of the dying man were addressed to you, and they were, 'I should have waited to hear what you wanted to tell me.' That indicates he knew you or had seen you before."

"Not necessarily," Jan said. "He could have been referring to waiting to be shot until I had answered his questions. When people are dying they sometimes say peculiar things. At the time that's what I thought—that it was an attempt at humor on his part. A sort of 'Too bad I had to get shot. Darned impolite of me,' sort of thing. I still think that's what it was."

"Also," Trowbridge went on, "several witnesses tell me you took some papers out of Stone's pocket. What did you do with them, and why didn't you hand them over to me when I arrived on the scene?"

"Oh, those," Jan said uncomfortably. "They're gone. The—" He took a deep breath. "Paula and I came here afterwards last night. I wanted to try some tests on those papers. The killer showed up and took them away from us."

"I see," Trowbridge almost whispered. "And of course you called the police at once." Then, when Jan shook his head mutely, "Why not? What do you think the police department is for? I don't like this. You aren't acting like an innocent bystander who saw a stranger shot. You steal papers. The killer shows up and takes them away from you, and you keep mum about it." He glared at Jan. "I think you'd better start talking, or I'm going to have to lock you up as a material witness and—" He clamped his lips together.

"You won't believe the truth," Jan said, "so there's no use talking."

"Why don't you try me?" Trowbridge said.

Jan looked at Paula helplessly.

"All right," he said. "The talk I gave last night wasn't a prepared speech. It was off the cuff. I understand a stenographer was there taking shorthand, and the speech would be published in the quarterly journal of the Society; but last night there was no existing copy of my speech—couldn't be." He paused a moment, then went on. "Those papers I took

were printed pages out of a journal, and they were my speech as I gave it last night. The paper was several years old."

"Go on," Trowbridge said. "I'm listening."

"In other words," Jan said, "those papers were impossible. They couldn't be in that man's pocket—unless he came from the future. Time travel. Coming back in Time from the future."

"I don't quite follow you," Trowbridge said.

"What I mean is," Jan said, "in a few weeks or months the stenographer will have translated her shorthand notes and my speech last night will be printed in the journal. It will be sent to a few hundred members of the society. Some will go to libraries. They set on shelves for years. Fred Stone, after quite a few years, runs across a copy of the journal, reads my speech, and by means of time travel comes back to attend the meeting and ask me some questions."

"And gets shot," Trowbridge added. "Tell me, doctor, just how far in the future did he come from?"

"Twenty-one sixty-three," Jan said quietly.

"You got that, of course, from the card in his billfold."

"Yes," Jan agreed, "but I confirmed before they were stolen from me. I did that by measuring the radio-activity of the paper and comparing it with charts."

Trowbridge looked at Jan with a sarcastic curve to his smile. Then slowly it was replaced by a frustrated expression.

"That's so absurd," he said, "that I find myself half believing it against my will." He paced around the lab, a frown on his face, while Jan and Paula watched him. "You know," he said, turning toward them abruptly, "if what you say it true, then Fred Stone could have been killed last night and yet be walking around full of life today."

"How?" Jan said. "I don't see how time travel could bring a man back to life after being dead. That's the thing I can't see."

"If he could come to last night from the future, Trowbridge said, "he could go to last night from today."

"That's right!" Jan exclaimed. "The man Paula saw could be Fred Stone then!"

"The way I see it," Trowbridge said, "right now he's trying to find you. That's what he's doing in this neighborhood. He can't find you, so he takes another jump backwards in Time and attends the meeting. *Then* he gets killed."

HE LOOKED at Jan and Paula who were staring at him with horror filled eyes.

"Another thing," Trowbridge said. "It gives his last words some sense. Suppose he does find you—say an hour from now—and you start to tell him he's going to be killed last night" —he chuckled dryly—"but he's scared away and doesn't have time to listen to you. Then last night when he was shot he suddenly realized you had tried to warn him."

Breath exploded from Jan's lungs. He leaned against a bench weakly.

"But now that we know all that," Paula said excitedly, "we can be prepared and force him to listen. Then he will know, and won't go back to last night, and won't be killed."

"You think so?" Trowbridge said dryly. "You forget that his being killed is already a fact. You can't change it."

"But when we see him it won't have happened yet to him," Paula said. "It's still in *his* future, and he can change that by simply not going back

to yesterday."

"Trowbridge is right," Jan said wearily. "We'll see Fred Stone sometime in our future. Maybe today when he locates us. But everything that takes place is unchangeable. His future has already happened. It can't be changed."

"If it could," Trowbridge said, "we could borrow his time travel machine or whatever it is he uses, and whenever there's an accident and someone gets killed we could go back before the accident and warn the victim, and the accident wouldn't happen."

"Maybe that could be done," Paula said earnestly. "And even if you're right, we shouldn't give up. We should try to change what has happened. We must warn him."

"Of course we'll try," Jan said. "But didn't he imply last night with his last words that we tried to warn him?"

"Oh!" Paula said angrily. "You're already giving up. I can just see you, January, trying half-heartedly to warn him, because you're convinced ahead of time that you won't succeed. We've got to really try. We've got to save his life. Do you understand?"

"Miss Morris is right," Trowbridge said. A twisted smile appeared on his lips. "And don't ever say anything about this. If my superiors ever learned I had treated your story seriously they'd put me back on a beat." He sobered. "Fred Stone will probably contact you here. He'll have to if you two stay here, anyway. So what we'll do is this. We'll get some men up here. In the hall and elevators, right in this room, down on the street. The minute Fred Stone shows up we'll grab him and hold him until we can make sure he knows he's going to be killed last night. That's all we can do."

He went to the phone...

"SOME MORE coffee, Paula?" Jan asked, holding the thermos invitingly.

Paula looked down at the remains of the meal on her plate and the empty coffee cup. "No, thanks," she said. "I'm so full of it now it's running out of my ears."

Trowbridge punched out a cigarette on the already over filled ashtray. "I'll have another," he said. He stared at the top of Jan's head as the coffee was poured. "You know, Jan," he said slowly, "there's one thing I haven't got straightened out yet. Why was—or will be—Fred Stone killed? The way you painted it he was just curious about your speech and wanted to ask a question or two about it. So he travels back in time to ask those questions. What was your speech about? Why should anyone a couple of hundred years from now be so curious about what you said—or didn't say, to be more exact. And why should he be killed *before he could find out what he wanted to know?*"

Jan looked at Paula, frowning. "I don't know," he said. "I've been trying to figure out that myself. But there's another possibility. Suppose he was killed to prevent him from revealing something, rather than to prevent him from finding out something."

Trowbridge thought this over, lighting another cigarette.

"If that's the way it is," he said, "then the future is able to change. If it couldn't, whatever he might possibly tell you wouldn't matter. It would be a matter of history whether he did or not, and it would be silly of the killer to try to prevent something that had already happened anyway."

"No," Jan said. "I think the future is an open book that can be changed. It's the past that can't be changed."

Paula snorted. "Don't forget all this is the remote past to the time Fred Stone came from," she said. "By the

same token it would be unchangeable to him. And to the murderer."

"Paula's right," Trowbridge chuckled.

"Then we come down to this," Jan said. "We know that travel in time is possible now. We could have someone come back to our present time from a million years in the future—or up to the present from a million years in the past. Either none of it is changeable, and our least little thought or action is as unalterable as a movie, or else it's all changeable. If it's unalterable there's no such thing as free will. Even the flutter of an eyelid is as unchangeable as the travel of the planets in their orbits, according to the one picture. In the other picture, the past could be changed. Columbus could be prevented from discovering America at any moment—and we would cease to exist."

"I doubt if it would be that drastic," Trowbridge said. "If Columbus was prevented from discovering America, someone else would. Details could be altered but major trends and developments probably couldn't."

"Maybe," Jan said doubtfully.

"But let's get back to the subject," Trowbridge said. "Do you know anything that a man from the future might be very anxious to find out? Enough so to come back in Time? Something so important that someone else from his Time would follow him and kill him to keep him from finding out? *Something the killer knows?*"

Jan stiffened in surprise. Trowbridge watched him intently.

"So there is something," he grunted.

"No," Jan said with a supreme effort at being casual. "It's just that I hadn't thought of that possibility before—that the murderer might know something he killed Fred Stone to keep him from finding out." He had gained control of himself now. "How could *I* know what it is? Something hinted at in my speech perhaps. Some little thing I don't know the implications of, that two centuries has brought out in a different light that I can't suspect."

"Or something that you as a scientist have discovered and never given out to the world," Trowbridge suggested. "What's the name of this best seller of yours? I think I'd like something to read while we wait for Fred Stone to show up."

He went to the phone, picked it up, and looked questioningly at Jan. Jan shrugged in defeat.

"You'll find a copy in the top drawer of the desk," he said glumly. "It's called 'Me and My Robot'."

"Thanks," Trowbridge said, returning the phone gently to its cradle. "Thanks." He opened the drawer.

TROWBRIDGE closed the book slowly. He looked up at Paula, across the laboratory asleep on a cot that had been set up, and at Jan who was heating some fluid in a test tube over a bunsen burner.

"Nice story, Jan," he commented. Jan looked over at him and smiled nervously. "An intriguing story," Trowbridge went on. "So well written that at times I almost became convinced it was a true story. That idea of a recording of the mind—taken from the idea of taking a recording of the voice, no doubt—and placing it in a synthetic brain that controls a robot body. *That* could be fact. I've seen one of those robot monstrosities they build for the movie and television shows, with its plastic muscles that look and perform just like real muscles." He looked down at the book on his knee and tapped it significantly while Jan watched. "The way you tied it up so neatly, too. All the robots destroyed. The secret safe in the mind of the hero where it was des-

tined to remain, because it was too dangerous to let loose. I suppose your speech last night was about this book?"

"Yes," Jan said, turning back to the now boiling test tube.

"The hero George couldn't have been you, could it, Jan?" Trowbridge asked dryly.

"Why of course not," Jan said without turning to look at Trowbridge. "It's just a story. That's all."

"And the girl in the story—Louise—she couldn't by any chance be Paula?"

"Well," Jan said, "of course I made her very much like Paula."

"How long has Mr. Morris been dead?" Trowbridge asked. He jumped to his feet abruptly, a startled look on his face. "Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "A year and a half ago I was on a case. A patient in a hospital that was going to die anyway in a few hours was supposedly killed. The outer layer of his brain was fried in some mysterious way. *If* he was killed—even the doctors couldn't be positive one way or another—it was just the way it happened in your book when the fellow's mind was transplanted into the synthetic brain, killing him in the process." He nodded slowly. Jan continued to concentrate on the test tube, his back to Trowbridge. Trowbridge smiled at the back sympathetically. "Don't worry, Jan," he said. "Your secret is safe as far as I'm concerned."

"You mean—" Jan said, turning abruptly to stare at the detective with hope dawning in his eyes.

Trowbridge nodded. "If the story in this book is true," he said, "I agree with you that it should be kept secret. Forgotten."

He stretched wearily, laid the book on the desk.

"But it's only fiction," Jan said, smiling queerly. "How could it be anything else? Don't you agree?"

"Of course," Trowbridge said, grinning.

He went to the door and opened it, sticking his head out into the hall with his shoulders against the door edge and the wall. The low rumble of whispered conversation went on for a minute, then he stepped back into the room, two plainclothesmen coming in.

"I'm going home, Mr. Stevens," Trowbridge said. "These men will stay here with you. They'll be relieved at midnight. You and Miss Morris are to remain here until Fred Stone shows up. If you want anything, one of my men will see that you get it." He looked over at Paula who was still asleep, nodded in Jan's direction, and left.

The two men took up positions on either side of the door and pulled up laboratory stools, settling down to a long vigil.

TROWBRIDGE, freshly shaven and alert looking, smiled sympathetically at Jan and Paula. "Too bad you had to stay here all night for nothing," he said. "It'll probably be all over by noon. Then you can go home and get some real rest."

"I didn't mind," Paula said. "It's worth it if we can save Fred Stone's life."

"I did some work," Jan said. "The time wasn't exactly wasted."

The phone shrilled unexpectedly. The three of them looked at it, then at one another. Jan went to it. Lifting it hesitantly he said, "Hello? Yes, this is Mr. Stevens... That's quite all right... Yes. Thanks very much for telling me... It was quite all right... Goodbye." He hung up, an excited expression on his face.

"That was the president of the Society," he said. "About fifteen minutes ago a man called her and asked where he could get in touch with the

author of 'Me and My Robot'. She told him, then got to wondering if she had done the right thing. That's why she called." He looked from Trowbridge to Paula excitedly. "Maybe it was Fred Stone!"

"Did she give him this address?" Trowbridge asked.

"Yes," Jan said. "It was the only one she knew."

"Then he should be here almost any minute!" Paula said.

"My man in the lobby of the building will call up as soon as he gets on the elevator," Trowbridge said. "When he gets on this floor there are men posted out of sight who will prevent him from leaving until and unless I give an okay."

They looked at the door, becoming conscious of the occasional footsteps outside in the hall as people passed by, the vague shadow outline of their forms as they passed the frosted glass of the door.

"They might miss him," Jan said.

"It's possible, of course," Trowbridge said. "But—"

He stopped. Someone had halted outside. The shadow of an arm went up. A knock sounded.

"They missed him in the lobby," Trowbridge said in a low voice, "but my men in the hall will see him and close in as soon as he enters. Go to the door and let him in, Jan."

Jan was already on his way to the door. He opened it wide. Standing framed in the doorway was—not Fred Stone—but the man who had killed him!

"Are you January Stevens?" the man asked politely.

"Why—why yes," Jan stammered.

"May I come in Mr. Stevens?" the man asked. "I see you have company, but what I want to see you about is very important."

"Come right in," Trowbridge spoke up, his voice overly loud. Two men had appeared silently behind the man. "Bring him in, boys," Trowbridge added as he saw them.

The man, feeling heavy hands grasp his arms, turned startled but unafraid eyes at them. As they firmly pressured him through the doorway into the laboratory he started to resist, then gave in, a puzzled but tolerant smile on his lips.

"We didn't expect *you*," Jan said.

"Naturally not," the man said. "Who are these people, the police?"

"Yes," Jan said.

"Yes," Trowbridge echoed. "Jan, is this the man you saw?" When Jan nodded he turned to the man. "I'm arresting you for murder," he said simply. "I'd also like to ask you some questions right now before the boys take you in; but I also have to advise you that anything you say can be used against you as evidence, and you don't have to answer any of the questions before getting an attorney." He looked past the man to one of his two subordinates. "Put the cuffs on him. We don't want to take any chances."

Jan and Paula watched, fascinated, as the handcuffs were snapped on the man.

"What's your name?" Trowbridge asked abruptly.

"Sigmund Archer," the man answered. He looked from Trowbridge to Jan and Paula, his eyes bright—almost laughing. "Would you tell me the name of the person I'm supposed to have killed?" Trowbridge stared at him but didn't answer. "Would it by any chance be Fred Stone?" Sigmund Archer asked.

"You should know," Trowbridge grunted.

"But I don't," Archer said, showing relief. "I just wanted to make sure it won't be—wasn't some innocent party."

"It was Fred Stone," Trowbridge said. "Why did you do it?"

Sigmund Archer laughed. Jan fought to keep from smiling, and looked at the puzzled frown on Trowbridge's face.

"Don't you see what he's laughing about?" Jan said. "He hasn't gone back to night before last and killed Fred Stone yet. If you arrest him for that murder it will prevent him from going back and committing the murder. There won't have been any murder, and you can't convict him."

"So it will be night before last!" Archer said musingly.

"Keep quiet and let me do the talking," Trowbridge said to Jan sternly. Then to Archer, "If that's the way it will be, okay. I'd much rather prevent a killing than catch a killer. You're still under arrest until we can warn Fred Stone."

"If in my future I shoot Fred Stone night before last in your past," Sigmund Archer said, "isn't it a foregone conclusion that you aren't going to be able to hold me and prevent that which has already happened?"

"You're in a better position to answer that than I am," Trowbridge said. "I don't know anything about the mumbo jumbo of time travel. All I know is that a murder has been committed, and that you have been positively identified as the murderer. It's my duty to arrest you and bring you to trial. I intend to carry out my duty."

SIGMUND ARCHER looked at Trowbridge, his smile fading slowly.

"I suppose you have Fred Stone's remains," he said suddenly. "Mind if I look at them for the purpose of identifying them?"

Trowbridge opened his mouth, then clamped it shut, giving Jan and Paula warning looks. He appeared to be thinking for a moment.

"We might arrange that later," he said cautiously.

"In other words you had the body but it's vanished," Archer said calmly. "That would make an interesting point in law, if it ever came to court. But it won't, because if it did there would be a record of it *where* I come from."

Anger suffused Trowbridge's features. He opened his mouth to make an angry retort. The anger vanished abruptly, to be replaced by shrewdness.

"I nearly forgot the main question I was going to ask you," he said. "Why are you after Fred Stone? Why did you shoot him?"

"I didn't—yet," Archer said. "My reason—I'm quite sure that January Stevens can guess that."

He looked at Jan. Trowbridge smiled knowingly at Jan and said, "It's possible I could guess far more accurately than he could."

"I'm thirsty," Sigmund Archer said abruptly. "Could I have a glass of water?"

"I'll get it," Jan said, going toward the water cooler against the wall. All eyes were on him for an instant.

A clang of something metallic falling to the floor jerked their attention back. Sigmund Archer had vanished. The handcuffs that had been on his wrists were on the floor.

"I caught it out of the corner of my eye," one of the two detectives said. "He became sort of transparent like he was made of glass, and vanished."

"And," Trowbridge said dryly, "he could have done it at any time since he came in here."

The phone shrilled with startling suddenness. It was Trowbridge who recovered from the paralysis of surprise first. He took two quick strides to the phone and scooped it up.

"Yes," he said curtly. Then, "Okay, stand by down there. Don't let him out if he goes back down." He dropped the phone and looked at the others.

"Fred Stone just entererd the elevator," he said quietly.

THE KNOCK at the door was three regularly spaced polite raps. Every eye in the room was fixed intently on the shadowy movements on the frosted glass that accompanied the knocking.

It was Trowbridge who went to the door, motioning Jan back.

Jan looked at Paula desperately, then took a deep breath. Paula, eyes round, turned from him back to the door as Towbridge twisted the knob.

After he had twisted the knob Trowbridge seemed to hesitate a second. Then he jerked the door open and reached out, seizing the startled Fred Stone by the arm and jerking him off balance, propelling him into the room.

"Fred!" Jan said swiftly. "You're going to be killed!"

But the hurtling figure of Fred Stone had vanished before their eyes, leaving Trowbridge with a stupid surprise on his face as he looked at his empty fingers.

"Now you've done it!" Jan said. "You scared the wits out of him with that stupid play."

"Maybe he'll be back," Trowbridge said, still looking at his hand peculiarly.

"Be back?" Jan echoed angrily. "Don't you remember what he said just before he died? That he wished he had waited to hear what I was trying to say to him? He won't be back. He's gone back in time to attend that lecture and ask his questions—and be killed."

"I guess you're right," Trowbridge said, shaking his hand jerkily as if it was asleep. "So there's no use sticking around here any longer." He gave his two subordinates a significant look and went to the door.

He opened it and stood to one side while they went out. His eyes were on Jan, sympathetically. Jan was glaring at him, so angry he was speechless.

"I wouldn't bother about it too much if I were you, Jan," he said kindly. "Remember you have a secret you'd die rather than reveal. A scientific secret that could conceivably do a lot of damage in the wrong hands—now or two hundred years from now. Me, I probably wouldn't understand it if you told it to me. One thing I do know though is cops. Being one myself I can tell one a mile off." A grin flashed across his face as he backed out of the door. He closed it until only his face and part of his body were visible. "You see, Jan," he said softly, "Sigmund Archer was a cop."

He withdrew his head. The door closed softly.