

HAM SANDWICH

It gets difficult to handle the problem of a man who has a real talent that you need badly—and he cannot use it if he knows it's honest!

by JAMES H. SCHMITZ

ILLUSTRATED BY LEO SUMMERS

There was no one standing or sitting around the tastefully furnished entry hall of the Institute of Insight when Wallace Cavender walked into it. He was almost half an hour late for the regular Sunday night meeting of advanced students; and even Mavis Greenfield, Dr. Ormond's secretary, who always stayed for a while at her desk in the hall to sign in the stragglers, had disappeared. However, she had left the attendance book lying open on the desk with a pen placed invitingly beside it.

Wallace Cavender dutifully entered his name in the book. The distant deep voice of Dr. Aloys Ormond was dimly audible, coming from the direction of the lecture room, and Cavender followed its faint reverberations down a narrow corridor until he reached a closed door. He eased the door open and slipped unobtrusively into the back of the lecture room.

As usual, most of the thirty-odd advanced students present had seated themselves on the right side of the room where they were somewhat closer to the speaker. Cavender started towards the almost vacant rows of chairs on the left, smiling apologetically at Dr. Ormond who, as the door opened, had glanced up without interrupting his talk. Three other faces turned towards Cavender from across the room. Reuben Jeffries, a heavy-set man with a thin fringe of black hair circling an otherwise bald scalp, nodded soberly and looked away again. Mavis Greenfield, a few rows farther up, produced a smile and a reproachful little headshake; during the coffee break she would carefully explain to Cavender once more that students too tardy to take in Dr. Al's introductory lecture missed the most valuable part of these meetings.

From old Mrs. Folsom, in the front row on the right, Cavender's belated arrival drew a more definite rebuke. She stared at him for half a dozen

seconds with acoldly severe frown, mouth puckered in disapproval, before returning her attention to Dr. Ormond.

Cavender sat down in the first chair he came to and let himself go comfortably limp. He was dead-tired, had even hesitated over coming to the Institute of Insight tonight. But it wouldn't do to skip the meeting. A number of his fellow students, notably Mrs. Folsom, already regarded him as a black sheep; and if enough of them complained to Dr. Ormond that Cavender's laxness threatened to retard the overall advance of the group towards the goal of Total Insight, Ormond might decide to exclude him from further study. At a guess, Cavender thought cynically, it would have happened by now if the confidential report the Institute had obtained on his financial status had been less impressive. A healthy bank balance wasn't an absolute requirement for membership, but it helped... it helped! All but a handful of the advanced students were in the upper income brackets.

Cavender let his gaze shift unobtrusively about the group while some almost automatic part of his mind began to pick up the thread of Dr. Al's discourse. After a dozen or so sentences, he realized that the evening's theme was the relationship between subjective and objective reality, as understood in the light of Total Insight. It was a well-worn subject; Dr. Al repeated himself a great deal. Most of the audience nevertheless was following his words with intent interest, many taking notes and frowning in concentration. As Mavis Greenfield liked to express it, quoting the doctor himself, the idea you didn't pick up when it was first presented might come clear to you the fifth or sixth time around. Cavender suspected, however, that as far as he was concerned much of the theory of Total Insight was doomed to remain forever obscure.

He settled his attention on the only two students on this side of the room with him. Dexter Jones and Perrie Rochelle were sitting side by side in front-row chairs—the same chairs they usually occupied during these meetings. They were exceptions to the general run of the group in a number of ways. Younger, for one thing; Dexter was twenty-nine and Perrie twenty-three while the group averaged out at around forty-five which happened to be Cavender's age. Neither was blessed with worldly riches; in fact, it was questionable whether the Rochelle girl, who described herself as a commercial artist, even had a bank account. Dexter Jones, a grade school teacher, did have one but was able to keep it barely high enough to cover his rent and car payment checks. Their value to the Institute was of a different kind. Both possessed esoteric mental talents, rather modest ones, to be sure, but still very interesting, so that on

occasion they could state accurately what was contained in a sealed envelope, or give a recognizable description of the photograph of a loved one hidden in another student's wallet. This provided the group with encouraging evidence that such abilities were, indeed, no fable and somewhere along the difficult road to Total Insight might be attained by all.

In addition, Perrie and Dexter were volunteers for what Dr. Aloys Ormond referred to cryptically as "very advanced experimentation." The group at large had not been told the exact nature of these experiments, but the implication was that they were mental exercises of such power that Dr. Al did not wish other advanced students to try them, until the brave pioneer work being done by Perrie and Dexter was concluded and he had evaluated the results...

"Headaches, Dr. Al," said Perrie Rochelle. "Sometimes quite bad headaches—" She hesitated. She was a thin, pale girl with untidy arranged brown hair who vacillated between periods of vivacious alertness and activity and somewhat shorter periods of blank-faced withdrawal. "And then," she went on, "there are times during the day when I get to feeling sort of confused and not quite sure whether I'm asleep or awake... you know?"

Dr. Ormond nodded, gazing at her reflectively from the little lectern on which he leaned. His composed smile indicated that he was not in the least surprised or disturbed by her report on the results of the week's experiments—that they were, in fact, precisely the results he had expected. "I'll speak to you about it later, Perrie," he told her gently. "Dexter... what experiences have you had?"

Dexter Jones cleared his throat. He was a serious young man who appeared at meetings conservatively and neatly dressed and shaved to the quick, and rarely spoke unless spoken to.

"Well, nothing very dramatic, Dr. Al," he said diffidently. "I did have a few nightmares during the week. But I'm not sure there's any connection between them and, uh, what you were having us do."

Dr. Ormond stroked his chin and regarded Dexter with benevolence. "A connection seems quite possible, Dexter. Let's assume it exists. What can you tell us about those nightmares?"

Dexter said he was afraid he couldn't actually tell them anything. By the time he was fully awake he'd had only a very vague impression of what the nightmares were about, and the only part he could remember clearly now

was that they had been quite alarming.

Old Mrs. Folsom, who was more than a little jealous of the special position enjoyed by Dexter and Perrie, broke in eagerly at that point to tell about a nightmare *shed* had during the week and which *she* could remember fully; and Cavender's attention drifted away from the talk. Mrs. Folsom was an old bore at best, but a very wealthy old bore, which was why Dr. Ormond usually let her ramble on a while before steering the conversation back to the business of the evening. But Cavender didn't have to pretend to listen.

From his vantage point behind most of the group, he let his gaze and thoughts wander from one to the other of them again. For the majority of the advanced students, he reflected, the Institute of Insight wasn't really too healthy a place. But it offered compensations. Middle-aged or past it on the average, financially secure, vaguely disappointed in life, they'd found in Dr. Al a friendly and eloquent guide to lead them into the fascinating worlds of their own minds. And Dr. Al was good at it. He had borrowed as heavily from yoga and western mysticism as from various orthodox and unorthodox psychological disciplines, and composed his own system, almost his own cosmology. His exercises would have made conservative psychiatrists shudder, but he was clever enough to avoid getting his flock into too serious mental difficulties. If some of them suffered a bit now and then, it made the quest of Total Insight and the thought that they were progressing towards that goal more real and convincing. And meeting after meeting Dr. Al came up with some intriguing new twist or device, some fresh experience to keep their interest level high.

"Always bear in mind," he was saying earnestly at the moment, "that an advance made by *any* member of the group benefits the group as a whole. Thus, because of the work done by our young pioneers this week I see indications tonight that the group is ready to attempt a new experiment... an experiment at a level I frankly admit I hadn't anticipated you would achieve for at least another two months."

Dr. Ormond paused significantly, the pause underlining his words. There was an expectant stirring among the students.

"But I must caution you!" he went on. "We cannot, of course, be certain that the experiment will succeed... in fact, it would be a very remarkable thing if it did succeed at a first attempt. But if it should, you will have had a rather startling experience! You will have seen a thing generally considered to be impossible!"

He smiled reassuringly, stepping down from the lectern. “Naturally, there will be no danger. You know me well enough to realize that I never permit the group or individuals to attempt what lies beyond their capability.”

Cavender stifled a yawn, blinked water from his eyes, watching Ormond walk over to a small polished table on the left side of the room in front of the rows of chairs. On it Mavis Greenfield had placed a number of enigmatic articles, some of which would be employed as props in one manner or another during the evening’s work. The most prominent item was a small suitcase in red alligator hide. Dr. Ormond, however, passed up the suitcase, took a small flat wooden plate from the table and returned to the center of the room.

“On this,” he said, holding up the plate, “there rests at this moment the air of this planet and nothing else. But in a minute or two—for each of you, in his or her world of subjective reality—something else *will* appear on it.”

The students nodded comprehendingly. So far, the experiment was on familiar ground. Dr. Ormond gave them all a good-humored wink.

“To emphasize,” he went on, “that we deal here with practical, down-to-earth, *real* matters... not some mystical nonsense... to emphasize that, let us say that the object each of you will visualize on this plate will be—a ham sandwich!”

There were appreciative chuckles. But Cavender felt a twinge of annoyance. At the moment, when along with fighting off fatigue he’d been trying to forget that he hadn’t eaten since noon, Dr. Al’s choice looked like an unfortunate one. Cavender happened to be very fond of ham.

“Now here,” Ormond continued, putting the plate down, “is where this experiment begins to differ from anything we have done before. For all of us will try to imagine—to visualize as being on this plate—*the same ham sandwich*. And so there will be no conflict in our projections, let’s decide first on just what ingredients we want to put into it.” He smiled. “We’ll make this the finest ham sandwich our collective imagination can produce!”

There were more chuckles. Cavender cursed under his breath, his mouth beginning to water. Suggestions came promptly.

“Mustard?” Dr. Ormond said. “Of course— Not too sharp though, Eleanor?” He smiled at Mrs. Folsom. “I agree! A light touch of delicate salad mustard. Crisp lettuce... finely chopped gherkins. Very well!”

“Put it all on rye,” Cavender said helplessly. “Toasted rye.”

“Toasted rye?” Ormond smiled at him, looked around. “Any objections? No? Toasted rye it shall be, Wally. And I believe that completes our selection.”

He paused, his face turning serious. “Now as to that word of caution I gave you. For three minutes each of you will visualize the object we have chosen on the plate I will be holding up before me. You will do this with your eyes open, and to each of you, in your own subjective reality, the object will become, as you know, more or less clearly discernible.

“But let me tell you this. Do not be too surprised if at the end of that time, when the exercise is over, the object *remains visible to you...* does not disappear!”

There was silence for a moment. Then renewed chuckles, but slightly nervous ones, and not too many.

Dr. Ormond said sternly, “I am serious about that! The possibility, though it may be small tonight, is there. You have learned that, by the laws of Insight, any image of subjective reality, if it can be endowed with *all* the attributes of objective reality by its human creator, *must* spontaneously become an image in objective reality!

“In this case, our collective ham sandwich, if it were perfectly visualized, could not only be seen by you but felt, its weight and the texture of each of its ingredients perceived, their appetizing fragrance savored”—Cavender groaned mentally— “and more: if one of you were to eat this sandwich, he would find it exactly as nourishing as any produced by the more ordinary methods of objective reality.

“There are people in the world today,” Dr. Ormond concluded, speaking very earnestly now, “Who can do this! There always have been people who could do this. And you are following in their footsteps, being trained in even more advanced skills. I am aware to a greater extent than any of you of the latent power that is developing—has developed—in this group. Tonight, for the first time, that power will be focused, drawn down to a pinpoint, to accomplish one task.

“Again, I do not say that at the end of our exercise a ham sandwich will lie on this plate. Frankly, I don’t expect it. But I suggest very strongly that you don’t let it surprise or startle you too much if we find it here!”

There was dead stillness when he finished speaking. Cavender had a sense that the lecture room had come alive with eerie little chills. Dr. Ormond lifted the plate solemnly up before him, holding it between the

fingertips of both hands.

“Now, if you will direct your attention here... no, Eleanor, with your eyes open!

“Let us begin...”

Cavender sighed, straightened up in his chair, eyes fixed obediently on the wooden plate, and banned ham sandwiches and every other kind of food firmly from his thoughts. There was no point in working his appetite up any further when he couldn't satisfy it, and he would have to be on guard a little against simply falling asleep during the next three minutes. The cloudiness of complete fatigue wasn't too far away. At the edge of his vision, he was aware of his fellow students across the room, arranged in suddenly motionless rows like staring zombies. His eyelids began to feel leaden.

The three minutes dragged on, came to an end. Ormond slowly lowered his hands. Cavender drew a long breath of relief. The wooden plate, he noted, with no surprise, was still empty.

“You may stop visualizing,” Ormond announced.

There was concerted sighing, a creaking of chairs. The students came out of their semitrances, blinked, smiled, settled into more comfortable positions, waiting for Dr. Al's comments.

“No miracles this time!” Ormond began briskly. He smiled.

Mrs. Folsom said, “Dr. Al—”

He looked over at her. “Yes, Eleanor?”

Eleanor Folsom hesitated, shook her head. “No,” she said. “Go on. I'm sorry I interrupted.”

“That's all right.” Dr. Al gave her a warm smile. It had been, he continued, a successful exercise, a very promising first attempt, in spite of the lack of an immediate materialization, which, of course, had been only a remote possibility to start with. He had no fault to find with the quality of the group's effort. He had sensed it... as they, too, presently would be able to sense it... as a smooth flow of directed energy. With a little more practice... one of these days...

Cavender stifled one yawn, concealed another which didn't allow itself to be stifled behind a casually raised hand. He watched Ormond move over to the prop table, put the wooden plate down beside the red suitcase without interrupting his encouraging summary of the exercise, hesitate,

then pick up something else, something which looked like a flexible copper trident, and start back to the center of the room with it.

Mrs. Folsom's voice said shrilly, "*Dr. Al—!*"

Ormond looked patient.

"Yes, Eleanor? What is it?"

"Just now," Mrs. Folsom said, her voice still holding the shrill note, "just a moment ago, on the plate over there, I'm certain... I'm almost certain I saw the ham sandwich!"

She added breathlessly, "And that's what I was going to say before, Dr. Al! Right after you told us to stop visualizing I thought I saw the sandwich on the plate! But it was only for a moment and I wasn't sure. But now I'm sure, almost sure, that I saw it again on the plate on the table!"

The old woman was pointing a trembling finger towards the table. Her cheeks showed spots of hectic red. In the rows behind her, the students looked at one another, shook their heads in resignation, some obviously suppressing amusement. Others looked annoyed. They were all familiar with Eleanor Folsom's tendency to produce such little sensations during the meetings. If the evening didn't promise to bring enough excitement, Eleanor always could be counted on to take a hand in events.

Cavender felt less certain about it. This time, Mrs. Folsom sounded genuinely excited. And if she actually believed she'd seen something materialize, she might be fairly close to getting one of those little heart attacks she kept everyone informed about.

Dr. Al could have had the same thought. He glanced back at the prop table, asked gravely, "You don't see it there now, do you, Eleanor?"

Mrs. Folsom shook her head. "No. No, of course not! It disappeared again. It was only there for a second. But I'm sure I saw it!"

"Now this is very interesting," Ormond said seriously. "Has anyone else observed anything at all unusual during the last few minutes?"

There was a murmured chorus of dissent, but Cavender noticed that the expressions of amusement and annoyance had vanished. Dr. Al had changed the tune, and the students were listening intently. He turned back to Mrs. Folsom.

"Let us consider the possibilities here, Eleanor," he said. "For one thing, you should be congratulated in any case, because your experience shows that your visualization was clear and true throughout our exercise. If it

hadn't been, nothing like this could have occurred.

"But precisely what was the experience? There we are, as of this moment, on uncertain ground. You saw something. That no one else saw the same thing might mean simply that no one else happened to be looking at the plate at those particular instants in time. I, for example, certainly gave it no further attention after the exercise was over. You *may* then have observed a genuine materialization!"

Mrs. Folsom nodded vigorously. "Yes, I—"

"But," Ormond went on, "under the circumstances, the scientific attitude we maintain at this Institute demands that we leave the question open. For now. Because you might also, you understand, have projected—for yourself only—a vivid momentary impression of the image you had created during our exercise and were still holding in your mind."

Mrs. Folsom looked doubtful. The flush of excitement began to leave her face.

"Why... well, yes, I suppose so," she acknowledged unwillingly.

"Of course," Ormond said. "So tonight we shall leave it at that. The next time we engage in a similar exercise... well, who knows?" He gave her a reassuring smile. "I must say, Eleanor, that this is a very encouraging indication of the progress you have made!" He glanced over the group, gathering their attention, and raised the trident-like device he had taken from the table.

"And now for our second experiment this evening—"

Looking disappointed and somewhat confused, Eleanor Folsom settled back in her chair. Cavender also settled back, his gaze shifting sleepily to the remaining items on the prop table. He was frowning a little. It wasn't his business, but if the old woman had started to hypnotize herself into having hallucinations, Dr. Al had better turn to a different type of meeting exercises. And that probably was exactly what Ormond would do; he seemed very much aware of danger signals. Cavender wondered vaguely what the red suitcase on the table contained.

There was a blurry shimmer on the wooden plate beside the suitcase. Then something thickened there suddenly as if drawing itself together out of the air. Perrie Rochelle, sitting only ten feet back from the table, uttered a yelp—somewhere between surprise and alarm. Dexter Jones, beside her, abruptly pushed back his chair, made a loud, incoherent exclamation of some kind.

Cavender had started upright, heart hammering. The thing that had

appeared on the wooden plate vanished again.

But it had remained visible there for a full two seconds. And there was no question at all of what it had been.

For several minutes, something resembling pandemonium swirled about the walls of the lecture room of the Institute of Insight. The red suitcase had concealed the wooden plate on the prop table from the eyes of most of the students sitting on the right side of the room, but a number of those who could see it felt they had caught a glimpse of something. Of just what they weren't sure at first, or perhaps they preferred not to say.

Perrie and Dexter, however, after getting over their first shock, had no such doubts. Perrie, voice vibrant with excitement, answered the questions flung at her from across the room, giving a detailed description of the ham sandwich which had appeared out of nowhere on the polished little table and stayed there for an incredible instant before it vanished. Dexter Jones, his usually impassive face glowing and animated, laughing, confirmed the description on every point.

On the opposite side of the room, Eleanor Folsom, surrounded by her own group of questioners, was also having her hour of triumph, in the warmth of which a trace of bitterness that her first report of the phenomenon had been shrugged off by everyone—even, in a way, by Dr. Al—gradually dissolved.

Dr. Al himself, Cavender thought, remained remarkably quiet at first, though in the excitement this wasn't generally noticed. He might even have turned a little pale. However, before things began to slow down he had himself well in hand again. Calling the group to a semblance of order, he began smilingly to ask specific questions. The witnesses on the right side of the room seemed somewhat more certain now of what they had observed.

Dr. Ormond looked over at Cavender.

“And you, Wally?” he asked. “You were sitting rather far back, to be sure—”

Cavender smiled and shrugged.

“Sorry, Dr. Al. I just wasn't looking in that direction at the moment. The first suggestion I had that anything unusual was going on was when Perrie let out that wild squawk.”

There was general laughter. Perrie grinned and flushed.

“Well, I'd have liked to hear *your* squawk,” she told Cavender, “if you'd seen a miracle happen right before your nose!”

“Not a miracle, Perrie,” Ormond said gently. “We must remember that. We are working here with natural forces which produce natural phenomena. Insufficiently understood phenomena, perhaps, but never miraculous ones. Now, how closely did this materialization appear to conform to the subjective group image we had decided on for our exercise?”

“Well. I could only see it, of course, Dr. Al. But as far as I saw it, it was exactly what we’d... no, wait!” Perrie frowned, wrinkling her nose. “There was something added!” She giggled. “At least, I don’t remember anyone saying we should imagine the sandwich wrapped in a paper napkin!”

Across the room, a woman’s voice said breathlessly, “Oh! A *green* paper napkin, Perrie?”

Perrie looked around, surprised. “Yes, it was, Mavis.”

Mavis Greenfield hesitated, said with a nervous little laugh, “I suppose I did that. I added a green napkin after we started the exercise.” Her voice quavered for an instant. “I thought the image looked neater that way.” She looked appealingly at the students around her. “This is really incredible, isn’t it”

They gave her vague smiles. They were plainly still floating on a cloud of collective achievement—if they hadn’t created that sandwich, there could have been nothing to see!

It seemed to Cavender that Dr. Ormond’s face showed a flicker of strain when he heard Mavis’ explanation. But he couldn’t be sure because the expression—if it had been there—was smoothed away at once. Ormond cleared his throat, said firmly and somewhat chidingly, “No, not incredible, Mavis! Although—”

He turned on his smile. “My friends, I must admit that you *have* surprised me! Very pleasantly, of course. But what happened here is something I considered to be only a very remote possibility tonight. You are truly more advanced than I’d realized.

“For note this. If even one of you had been lagging behind the others, if there had been any unevenness in the concentration each gave to the exercise tonight, this materialization simply could not have occurred! And that fact forces me now to a very important decision.”

He went over to the prop table, took the suitcase from it. “Mavis,” he said gravely. “you may put away these other devices. We will have no further need for them in this group! Dexter, move the table to the center of the room for me, please.”

He waited while his instructions were hastily carried out, then laid the suitcase on the table, drew up a chair and sat down. The buzz of excited conversation among the students hushed. They stared at him in anticipatory silence. It appeared that the evening's surprises were not yet over—and they were ready for *anything* now!

“There is a point,” Dr. Ormond began in a solemn voice, riveting their eager attention on him, “a point in the orderly advance towards Total Insight at which further progress becomes greatly simplified and accelerated, because the student has now developed the capability to augment his personal efforts by the use of certain instruments.”

Cavender thoughtfully reached inside his coat, brought out a cigarette case, opened it and slowly put a cigarette to his lips. About to flick on a lighter, he saw Reuben Jeffries watching him with an expression of disapproval from across the aisle. Jeffries shook his head, indicated the NO SMOKING sign on the wall. Cavender nodded, smiling a rueful apology for his absent-mindedness, and returned the cigarette to its case. He shoved his hands into his trousers pockets, slouched back in the chair.

“I have told you,” Ormond was saying, “that the contributions many of you so generously made to the Institute were needed for and being absorbed by vital research. Tonight I had intended to give you a first inkling of what that research was accomplishing.” He tapped the suitcase on the table before him. “In there is an instrument of the kind I have mentioned. The beneficial forces of the Cosmos are harnessed by it, flow through it. And I believe I can say that my efforts in recent months have produced the most effective such device ever seen...”

“Dr. Al,” Mrs. Folsom interrupted firmly, “I think you should let them know how the instrument cured my heart condition.”

Faces shifted towards her, then back to Dr. Al. The middle-aged majority of the students pricked their ears. For each of them, conscious of the years of increasingly uncertain health to come, Mrs. Folsom's words contained a personal implication, one that hit home. But in spite of the vindication of her claim to have seen a materialized ham sandwich, they weren't quite ready to trust her about this.

Dr. Ormond's face was grave.

“Eleanor,” he said reprovingly, “that was letting the cat out of the bag. wasn't it? I hadn't intended to discuss that part of the matter just yet.”

He hesitated, frowning, tapping the table top lightly with his knuckles.

Mrs. Folsom looked unabashed. She had produced another sensation and knew it.

“Since it was mentioned,” Ormond said with deliberation at last, “it would be unfair not to tell you, at least in brief, the facts to which Eleanor was alluding. Very well then—Eleanor has served during the past several weeks as the subject of certain experiments connected with this instrument. She reports that after her first use of it, her periodically recurring heart problem ceased to trouble her.”

Mrs. Folsom smiled, nodded vigorously. “I have not,” she announced, “had one single touch of pain or dizziness in all this time!”

“But one should, of course,” Dr. Ormond added objectively, “hesitate to use the word ‘cure’ under such circumstances.”

In the front row someone asked, “Dr. Al, will the instrument heal... well, other physical conditions?”

Ormond looked at the speaker with dignity. “John, the instrument does, and is supposed to do, one thing. Providing, as I’ve said, that the student working with it has attained a certain minimum level of Insight, it greatly accelerates his progress towards Total Insight. Very greatly!

“Now, as I have implied before: as one approaches the goal of Total Insight, the ailments and diseases which commonly afflict humanity simply disappear. Unfortunately, I am not yet free to show you proof for this, although I have the proof and believe it will not be long before it can be revealed at least to the members of this group. For this reason, I have preferred not to say too much on the point... Yes, Reuben? You have a question?”

“Two questions, Dr. Al,” Reuben Jeffries said. “First, is it your opinion that our group has now reached the minimum level of Insight that makes it possible to work with those instruments?”

Ormond nodded emphatically. “Yes, it has. After tonight’s occurrence there is no further question about that.”

“Then,” Jeffries said, “my second question is simply —*when do we start*?”

There was laughter, a scattering of applause. Ormond smiled, said, “An excellent question, Reuben! The answer is that a number of you will start immediately.

“A limited quantity of the instruments—fifteen, I believe—are available now on the premises, stored in my office. Within a few weeks I will have enough on hand to supply as many of you as wish to speed up their

progress by this method. Since the group's contributions paid my research expenses, I cannot in justice ask more from you individually now than the actual cost in material and labor for each instrument. The figure... I have it somewhere... oh, yes!" Ormond pulled a notebook from his pocket, consulted it, looked up and said, mildly, "Twelve hundred dollars will be adequate, I think."

Cavender's lips twitched sardonically. Three or four of the group might have flinched inwardly at the price tag, but on the whole they were simply too well heeled to give such a detail another thought. Checkbooks were coming hurriedly into sight all around the lecture room. Reuben Jeffries, unfolding his, announced, "Dr. Al, I'm taking one of the fifteen."

Half the students turned indignantly to stare at him. "Now wait a minute, Reuben!" someone said. "That isn't fair! It's obvious there aren't enough to go around."

Jeffries smiled at him. "That's why I spoke up, Warren!" He appealed to Ormond. "How about it, Dr. Al?"

Ormond observed judiciously, "It seems fair enough to me. Eleanor, of course, is retaining the instrument with which she has been working. As for the rest of you—first come, first served, you know! If others would like to have Mavis put down their names..."

There was a brief hubbub as this suggestion was acted on. Mavis, Dexter Jones and Perrie Rochelle then went to the office to get the instruments, while Dr. Ormond consoled the students who had found themselves left out. It would be merely a matter of days before the new instruments began to come in... and yes, they could leave their checks in advance. When he suggested tactfully that financial arrangements could be made if necessary, the less affluent also brightened up.

Fifteen identical red alligator-hide suitcases appeared and were lined up beside Ormond's table. He announced that a preliminary demonstration with the instrument would be made as soon as those on hand had been distributed. Mavis Greenfield, standing beside him, began to read off the names she had taken down.

Reuben Jeffries was the fifth to come up to the table, hand Ormond his check and receive a suitcase from the secretary. Then Cavender got unhurriedly to his feet.

"Dr. Ormond," he said, loudly enough to center the attention of everyone in the room on him, "may I have the floor for a moment?"

Ormond appeared surprised, then startled. His glance went up to Reuben Jeffries, still standing stolidly beside him, and his face slowly whitened.

“Why... well, yes, Wally.” His voice seemed unsteady. “What’s on your mind?”

Cavender faced the right side of the room and the questioning faces turned towards him.

“My name, as you know,” he told the advanced students, “is Wallace Cavender. What you haven’t known so far is that I am a police detective, rank of lieutenant, currently attached to the police force of this city and in temporary charge of its bunco squad.”

He shifted his gaze towards the front of the room. Ormond’s eyes met his for a moment, then dropped.

“Dr. Ormond,” Cavender said, “you’re under arrest. The immediate charge, let’s say, is practicing medicine without a license. Don’t worry about whether we can make it stick or not. We’ll have three or four others worked up by the time we get you downtown.”

For a moment, there was a shocked, frozen stillness in the lecture room. Dr. Ormond’s hand began to move out quietly towards the checks lying on the table before him. Reuben Jeffries’ big hand got there first.

“I’ll take care of these for now, Dr. Al,” Jeffries said with a friendly smile. “The lieutenant thinks he wants them.”

Not much more than thirty minutes later, Cavender unlocked the door to Dr. Ormond’s private office, went inside, leaving the door open behind him, and sat down at Ormond’s desk. He rubbed his aching eyes, yawned, lit a cigarette, looked about in vain for an ashtray, finally emptied a small dish of paper clips on the desk and placed the dish conveniently close to him.

There had been an indignant uproar about Dr. Al’s arrest for a while, but it ended abruptly when uniformed policemen appeared in the two exit doors and the sobering thought struck the students that any publicity given the matter could make them look personally ridiculous and do damage to their business and social standing.

Cavender had calmed their fears. It was conceivable, he said, that the district attorney's office would wish to confer with some of them privately, in connection with charges to be brought against William Fitzgerald Grady —which, so far as the police had been able to establish, was Dr. Ormond's real name. However, their association with the Institute of Insight would not be made public, and any proceedings would be carried out with the discretion that could be fully expected by blameless citizens of their status in the community.

They were fortunate, Cavender went on, in another respect. Probably none of them had been aware of just how much Grady had milked from the group chiefly through quiet private contributions and donations during the two years he was running the Institute. The sum came to better than two hundred thousand dollars. Grady naturally had wasted none of this in "research" and he was not a spendthrift in other ways. Cavender was, therefore, happy to say that around two thirds of this money was known to be still intact in various bank accounts, and that it would be restored eventually to the generous but misled donors.

Dr. Al's ex-students were beginning to look both chastened and very much relieved. Cavender briefly covered a few more points to eliminate remaining doubts. He touched on Grady's early record as a confidence man and blackmailer, mentioned the two terms he had spent in prison and the fact that for the last eighteen years he had confined himself to operations like the Institute of Insight where risks were less. The profits, if anything, had been higher because Grady had learned that it paid off, in the long run, to deal exclusively with wealthy citizens and he was endowed with the kind of personality needed to overcome the caution natural to that class. As for the unusual experiences about which some of them might be now thinking, these, Cavender concluded, should be considered in the light of the fact that Grady had made his living at one time as a stage magician and hypnotist, working effectively both with and without trained accomplices.

The lecture had gone over very well, as he'd known it would. The ex-students left for their homes, a subdued and shaken group, grateful for having been rescued from an evil man's toils. Even Mrs. Folsom, who had announced at one point that she believed she had a heart attack coming on, recovered sufficiently to thank Cavender and assure him that in future she would take her problems only to a reliable physician.

Footsteps were coming down the short hall from the back of the building. Then Reuben Jeffries' voice said, "Go into the office. The

lieutenant's waiting for you there."

Cavender stubbed out his cigarette as Dexter Jones, Perrie Rochelle and Mavis Greenfield filed into the office. Jeffries closed the door behind them from the hall and went off.

"Sit down," Cavender said, lighting a fresh cigarette.

They selected chairs and settled down stiffly, facing him. All three looked anxious and pale; and Perrie's face was tear-stained.

Cavender said, "I suppose you've been wondering why I had Sergeant Jeffries tell you three to stay behind."

Perrie began, her eyes and voice rather wild, "Mr. Cavender... Lieutenant Cavender..."

"Either will do," Cavender said.

"Mr. Cavender, I swear you're wrong! We didn't have anything to do with Dr. Al's... Mr. Grady's cheating those people! At least, I didn't. I swear it!"

"I didn't say you had anything to do with it, Perrie," Cavender remarked. "Personally I think none of you had anything to do with it. Not voluntarily, at any rate."

He could almost feel them go limp with relief. He waited. After a second or two, Perrie's eyes got the wild look back. "But..."

"Yes?" Cavender asked.

Perrie glanced at Dexter Jones, at Mavis.

"But then what *did* happen?" she asked bewilderedly, of the other two as much as of Cavender. "Mr. Cavender, I saw something appear on that plate! I know it did. It was a sandwich. It looked perfectly natural. I don't think it could have *possibly* been something Mr. Grady did with mirrors. And how could it have had the paper napkin Mavis had just been thinking about wrapped around it, unless..."

"Unless it actually was a materialization of a mental image you'd created between you?" Cavender said. "Now settle back and relax, Perrie. There's a more reasonable explanation for what happened tonight than that."

He waited a moment, went on. "Grady's one real interest is money and since none of you have any to speak of, his interest in you was that you could help him get it. Perrie and Dexter showed some genuine talent to start with, in the line of guessing what card somebody was thinking about and the like. It's not too unusual an ability, and in itself it wasn't too useful

to Grady.

“But he worked on your interest in the subject. All the other students, the paying students, had to lose was a sizable amount of cash... with the exception of Mrs. Folsom who’s been the next thing to a flip for years anyway. She was in danger. And you three stood a good chance of letting Grady wreck your lives. I said he’s a competent hypnotist. He is. Also a completely ruthless one.”

He looked at Mavis. “As far as I know, Mavis, you haven’t ever demonstrated that you have any interesting extrasensory talents like Dexter’s and Perrie’s. Rather the contrary. Right?”

She nodded, her eyes huge.

“I’ve always tested negative. Way down negative. That’s why I was really rather shocked when that... Of course, I’ve always been fascinated by such things. And *he* insisted it would show up in me sometime.”

“And,” Cavender said, “several times a week you had special little training sessions with him, just as his two star pupils here did, to help it show up. You were another perfect stooge, from Grady’s point of view. Well, what it amounts to is that Grady was preparing to make his big final killing off this group before he disappeared from the city. He would have collected close to thirty thousand dollars tonight, and probably twice as much again within the next month or so before any of the students began to suspect seriously that Dr. Al’s instruments could be the meaningless contraptions they are.

“You three have been hypnotically conditioned to a fare-you-well in those little private sessions you’ve had with him. During the past week you were set up for the role you were to play tonight. When you got your cue—at a guess it was Mrs. Folsom’s claim that *she’d* seen the ham sandwich materialize—you started seeing, saying, acting, and thinking exactly as you’d been told to see, say, act, and think. There’s no more mystery about it than that. And in my opinion you’re three extremely fortunate young people in that we were ready to move in on Grady when we were.”

There was silence for a moment. Then Perrie Rochelle said hesitantly, “Then Mrs. Folsom...”

“Mrs. Folsom,” Cavender said, “has also enjoyed the benefits of many private sessions with Grady. She, of course, was additionally paying very handsomely for them. Tonight, she reported seeing what she’d been told to

report seeing, to set off the hypnotic chain reaction.”

“But,” Perrie said, “she said her heart attacks stopped after she started using the instrument. I really don’t see how that could have been just her imagination?”

“Very easily,” Cavender said. “I’ve talked with her physician. Mrs. Folsom belongs to a not uncommon type of people whose tickers are as sound as yours or mine, but who are convinced they have a serious heart ailment and can dish up symptoms impressive enough to fool anyone but an informed professional. They can stop dishing them up just as readily if they think they’ve been cured.” He smiled faintly. “You look as if you might be finally convinced, Perrie.”

She nodded. “I... yes, I guess so. I guess I am.”

“All right,” Cavender said. He stood up. “You three can run along then. You won’t be officially involved in this matter, and no one’s going to bother you. If you want to go on playing around with E.S.P. and so forth, that’s your business. But I trust that in future you’ll have the good sense to keep away from characters like Grady. Periods of confusion, chronic nightmares—even chronic headaches—are a good sign you’re asking for bad trouble in that area.”

They thanked him, started out of the office in obvious relief. At the door, Perrie Rochelle hesitated, looked back.

“Mr. Cavender...”

“Yes?”

“You don’t think I... I need...”

“Psychiatric help? No. But I understand,” Cavender said, “that you have a sister in Maine who’s been wanting you to spend the summer with her. I think that’s a fine idea! A month or two of sun and salt water is exactly what you can use to drive the last of this nonsense out of your mind again. So good night to the three of you, and good luck!”

Cavender snapped the top of the squat little thermos flask back in place and restored it to the glove compartment of Jeffries’ car. He brushed a few crumbs from the knees of his trousers and settled back in the seat, discovering he no longer felt nearly as tired and washed out as he had been an hour ago in the lecture room. A few cups of coffee and a little nourishment could do wonders for a man, even at the tail end of a week of hard work.

The last light in the Institute building across the street went out and Cavender heard the click of the front door. The bulky figure of Detective Sergeant Reuben Jeffries stood silhouetted for a moment in the street lights on the entrance steps. Then Jeffries came down the steps and crossed the street to the car.

“All done?” Cavender asked.

“All done,” Jeffries said through the window. He opened the door, eased himself in behind the wheel and closed the door.

“They took Grady away by the back entrance,” he told Cavender. “The records in his files... he wasn’t keeping much, of course... and the stuff in the safe and those instruments went along with him. He was very co-operative. He’s had a real scare.”

Cavender grunted. “He’ll get over it.”

Jeffries hesitated, said, “I’m something of a Johnny-come-lately in this line of work, you know. I’d be interested in hearing how it’s handled from here on.”

“In this case it will be pretty well standard procedure,” Cavender said. “Tomorrow around noon I’ll have Grady brought in to see me. I’ll be in a curt and bitter mood—the frustrated honest cop. I’ll tell him he’s in luck. The D. A.’s office has informed me that because of the important names involved in this fraud case, and because all but around forty thousand dollars of the money he collected in this town have been recovered, they’ve decided not to prosecute. He’ll have till midnight to clear out. If he ever shows up again, he gets the book.”

“Why leave him the forty thousand?” Jeffries asked. “I understood they know darn well where it’s stashed.”

Cavender shrugged. “The man’s put in two years of work, Reuben. If we clean him, he might get discouraged enough to get out of the racket and try something else. As it is, he’ll have something like the Institute of Insight going again in another city three months from now. In an era that hasn’t been cropped over recently. He’s good in that line... one of the best, in fact.”

Jeffries thoughtfully started the car, pulled out from the curb. Halfway down the block, he remarked, “You gave me the go-ahead sign with the cigarette right after the Greenfield girl claimed she’d put the paper napkin into that image. Does that mean you finally came to a decision about her?”

“Uh-huh.”

Jeffries glanced over at him, asked, “Is there any secret about how you’re able to spot them?”

“No... except that I don’t know. If I could describe to anyone how to go about it, we might have our work cut in half. But I can’t, and neither can any other spotter. It’s simply a long, tedious process of staying in contact with people you have some reason to suspect of being the genuine article. If they are, you know it eventually. But if it weren’t that men with Grady’s type of personality attract them somehow from ten miles around, we’d have no practical means at present of screening prospects out of the general population. You can’t distinguish one of them from anyone else if he’s just walking past you on the street.”

Jeffries brought the car to a halt at a stop light.

“That’s about the way I’d heard it,” he acknowledged. “What about negative spotting? Is there a chance there might be an undiscovered latent left among our recent fellow students?”

“No chance at all,” Cavender said. “The process works both ways. If they aren’t, you also know it eventually—and I was sure of everyone but Greenfield over three weeks ago. She’s got as tough a set of obscuring defenses as I’ve ever worked against. But after the jolt she got tonight, she came through clear immediately.”

The light changed and the car started up. Jeffries asked, “You feel both of them can be rehabilitated?”

“Definitely,” Cavender said. “Another three months of Grady’s pseudoyoga might have ruined them for good. But give them around a year to settle out and they’ll be all right. Then they’ll get the call. It’s been worth the trouble. Jones is good medium grade—and that Greenfield! She’ll be a powerhouse before she’s half developed. Easily the most promising prospect I’ve come across in six years.”

“You’re just as certain about Perrie Rochelle”

“Uh-huh. Protopsi—fairly typical. She’s developed as far as she ever will. It would be a complete waste of time to call her. You can’t train something that just isn’t there.”

Jeffries grunted. “Never make a mistake, eh?”

Cavender yawned, smiled. “Never have yet, Reuben! Not in that area.”

“How did you explain the sandwich to them—and Greenfield’s napkin? They couldn’t have bought your stage magic idea.”

“No. Told them those were Dr. Al’s posthypnotic suggestions. It’s the

other standard rationalization.”

They drove on in silence for a while. Then Jeffries cleared his throat.

“Incidentally,” he said. “I should apologize for the slip with the sandwich, even though it turned out to our advantage. I can’t quite explain it. I was thinking of other matters at the moment, and I suppose I...”

Cavender, who had been gazing drowsily through the windshield, shook his head.

“As you say, it turned out very well, Reuben. Aside from putting the first crack in Mavis Greenfield’s defenses, it shook up Dr. Al to the point where he decided to collect as much as he could tonight, cash the checks, and clear out. So he set himself up for the pinch. We probably gained as much as three or four weeks on both counts.”

Jeffries nodded. “I realize that. But...”

“Well, you’d have no reason to blame yourself for the slip in any case,” Cavender went on. “The fact is I’d been so confoundedly busy all afternoon and evening, I forgot to take time out for dinner. When that sandwich was being described in those mouth-watering terms, I realize I was really ravenous. At the same time I was fighting off sleep. Between the two, I went completely off guard for a moment, and it simply happened!”

He grinned. “As described, by the way, it *was* a terrific sandwich. That group had real imagination!” He hesitated, then put out his hand, palm up, before him. “As a matter of fact, just talking about it again seems to be putting me in a mood for seconds...”

Something shimmered for an instant in the dim air wrapped in its green tissue napkin, a second ham sandwich appeared. ;

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