

Act Two. The scene, Campbell's editorial *Assessment*.

John W. Campbell's long time assistant-secretary was Miss Katy Tarrant, a middle-aged maiden lady of Scottish descent and a devout Roman Catholic. Katy had come with the office, and John kept her happily, because Katy had two excellent job qualifications. First, she knew the magazine business, at least the pedestrian part of editing and meeting the deadlines with manuscripts that fit the book. And second, Katy was masterful with the big blue pencil to eliminate anything that might offend the Legion of Decency, bring down the wrath of the Watch and Ward Society, or even something innocent that might possibly be mispronounced that way.

As a result, most of us of John's writing tribe used to slip something into a story that would positively shock Katy into tight lips and harsh mutterings about us writers who put *such things* into a story. One of us—it wasn't me—once asked John what Katy would do if he sent her a black, filmy, see-through lacy nightgown for Christmas. John replied that she would wear it because, being Scottish, she would think it wasteful if she did not, and wearing it is a sin. But, said John with a chuckle, she'd blush all night for wearing such a provocative filmy *to bed*; And a *Present from a (Married!) Man!*

John chuckled over the joke, wrote "O.K!" on the manuscript, and sent it along for processing.

L. Jerome Stanton chuckled over the joke, and passed it along to Katy to read and file, and to sanitize it for the benefit of those guardians of our virtue.

But our maiden lady, Katy Tarrant, didn't understand the punch line.

John's attitude? Officially and professionally outraged, but secretly amused.

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In my meandering away from my minimum security prison, L. Ron began to talk about a theory that he'd evolved while recovering from one of the scraps in the Aleutians. The process was a collection of snippets and bits of this and that. Scraps of what is taught in the simplest of elementary psychology. Scraps of hypnosis, although he denied that with him was a "healing" process, generally based upon the fair-to-middling concept that the teachings of Christian Science were and are sound, so long as one has the sense to c

splints and a crutch instead of Mary Baker Eddy if one's leg is broken.

As Ron reasoned, this gimmick mustn't so much as pretend to make noises like medicine, because both the law and the AMA would be hot on the trail. It mustn't interfere with religion because religion is too well organized to put up with outside competition. It shouldn't be a cult, because cults attract professional cultists. But it should offer relief to those who were ailing with something that neither the clergy nor medicine could clearly define.

L. Ron, slowly perfecting his theory, got in touch with a few of the impressionable souls in the New York area, and L. Ron studied them, slowly getting to the final outcome: *Dianetics*.

During this period, L. Ron held his sessions in the evenings during the week, leaving the weekends mostly open. This was fine with me. I enjoyed visiting Ron from time to time, but as I told him, "If I have problems, and they must be removed, I'll prefer a professional head shrinker instead of a soldier of fortune, adventurer, and science fiction writer."

On one of those weekends, the telephone rang about noon on Sunday. L. Ron saw me when he returned, that Doña Campbell was about to come over. Then he eyed me sharply. "George, for God's sake don't mention dianetics to Doña. If you do, she'll tell John, and he don't want John to dive into this as his next hobby until I'm ready to leak it to him myself at the proper moment."

Doña had come over to get some peace. John, she said, had discovered "high fidelity," had built a 50-watt amplifier, and was spending his spare time trying to see how high his fidelity could get out of the old, 78-rpm shellac records of the day. The house, she reported, was reverberating on every floor with John's 50-watt run at full tilt.

Here I must explain a technical detail that made the uproar worse. The power output tubes of that day struggled and strained to deliver every watt; as a consequence, the loudspeakers of that time were designed to deliver as much sound per watt as they could. At the time, a comfortable level of music for just background sound was about a quarter watt, and, for real listening to classical music, between one and one and a half watts. Six months before the war, I'd helped to install an amplifying system for a roller-skating rink. We found that one 60-watt amplifier at either end of the rink gave enough sound to cut through the noise on a busy night.

By contrast, everything changed in the late 1950s. Power amplifiers could deliver high wattage with ease, and as a consequence, the loudspeakers today are damped and loaded to spread out the audible sound spectrum they could deliver. The ordinary amplifier of John's high fidelity days could hardly drive today's speaker, and today's amplifiers would blow the speakers of yesterday.

I put this in because we have amplifiers that deliver 50 to 100 watts today, and I understood that 50 watts in 1947 must not be compared to 50 watts today insofar as amount of sound level produced.

So, since Elizabeth and Westfield are fairly close, Doña escaped the racket from time to time by visiting the Hubbard place, and the four of us would play bridge and have quiet drink far from John's cellar and his 50 watts.

The time is in the late 1940s, and I'd run Venus Equilateral into the ground and was looking for new worlds to conquer. In one of our meetings, Doña chuckled over the idea used in "Rat Race" in using a time machine for a mouse trap. And I replied that mostly traveling stories are founded on the idea of "Let's kill gran'pa!" and what gimmicks they could cook up to cover the paradox.

So it occurred to me that maybe I might play the game backward; that is, instead of *killing* gran'pa, let's go back and make sure that gran'pa is ~~propagated~~ from one of his intended follies. The following is the answer.

Meddler's Moon

By George O. Smith

Peter Hedgerly heard the door open and close, and he smiled at his reflection in the mirror. He turned partly, and called out through the semi-closed bedroom door.

"Sit down, honey. I'll be right out."

Joan Willson was early, he thought, but it made no matter. It merely gave them more time together—

"I'll sit down," came a deep, pleasant masculine rumble, "but I'm not your honey."

Peter hit the door, and skidded into the living room, his loose shirttail flying out behind him. "Who're you?" he demanded sharply.

"Please do not be disturbed. Finish dressing," said the stranger. Peter measured him. A few pounds heavier than Peter's one hundred and sixty; an inch taller than Peter.

five feet eleven. About the same sandy blond complexion. The face was wreathed in a beatific smile which in no way matched Peter's exasperation.

"I'm expecting a guest," snapped Peter. "The door was open for... the guest. No stray strangers seeking company or whatever."

"I know. My presence will make no difference."

"No difference?" exploded Peter angrily. "Look, sport, there's a crowd. Technically you're trespassing. Shall I prove it by calling the police?"

"You may if you wish," replied the stranger. "But I happen to know for certain that I will not."

"No?" snapped Peter. He headed toward the telephone with all the determination of the world. The stranger watched him tolerantly. Peter reached the table beside the door, reached for the phone. As his hand touched it the door opened, and Joan Willson came in. She gulped at Peter and said, "Oh!"

Peter became aware of the fact that his nether raiment consisted of shoes, socks, paisley-print shorts and a curtailed-shirttailed WPB model shirt.

He echoed Joan's "Oh!"

His ejaculation died like the diminishing wail of a retreating fire siren. That was because the duration of the monosyllabic diphthong exceeded the time necessary for him to gain the security of the bedroom, where he donned his trousers and wished there were something he could do to cover the blush of embarrassment on his face. His ears, especially.

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Through the door he heard the stranger say, "Please come in, Miss Willson. Peter's condition is but temporary."

"But why... what... and who are you?"

"That's a long story," replied the stranger. He turned and called out to Peter. "I told you you'd not call the police!"

"Police!" exclaimed Joan. "Peter, is... is—?"

"Not at all," said the stranger, interrupting her, and intercepting the words which had been intended for Peter. "I've had too little time to make explanation. I'm Joseph Hedgocock."

“Relative of his?” asked Joan.

“Quite. And quite close.”

Peter called, “Never heard of you.”

“You will,” replied Hedgerly. “You see, Peter, I’m here to help you.”

“And if I need no help?”

“You do.”

“Let me be judge, huh?” snapped Peter.

“You’re in poor position to judge. That’s why this help is thrust upon you, so to speak. After a bit you’ll understand.”

“Thanks,” said Peter. Slowly, he came into the living room again, and faced Joan. She flushed.

“Honest, Joan,” he started, but the girl shrugged. “Don’t apologize for a sheer accident,” she said.

“It was no accident,” said Hedgerly.

Peter whirled. “Look, chaperone, who invited you in? As for any relation of mine to you?”

Hedgerly arose carefully. “I am Joseph Hedgerly, your grandson.”

Joan looked at Peter and laughed heartily. “Peter Faust Hedgerly. Having a thirty-odd-year-old grandson is quite a record for such as you,” she told him. “You will be thirty-two next birthday.”

Peter turned to the other angrily. “Can it,” he snapped. “Grandson my ankle!”

“I am your grandson.”

“Yeah ... sure. Shall I call the cops now?”

“You could, but you will not.”

“Oh spinach!” Peter headed for the phone again but the stranger said, quietly, “No.”

listen to me, Peter.”

Peter stopped, turned, and said, “Explain—and explain fast!”

“You are a physicist with the Abstract Laboratory at Chicago. You also tinker in your study here. Your son—my father—will take up home tinkering also, and your son’s son—myself—will eventually discover the secret of time travel. I’ve done this. I am not here to see that things evolve with a minimum of effort.”

Peter shrugged. “You could have saved your time,” he said. “If you’d not interfered, I would have asked Miss Willson to marry me.”

“That’s the point,” smiled Hedgerly. “You see, Peter, my grandmother’s name was Willson, nor Joan. Peter Hedgerly—according to the family history—married a girl by the name of Marie Baker.”

“Never heard of her,” grunted Peter.

“You will,” smiled Hedgerly. He turned to Joan. “I’m sorry,” he told her. “I have no choice against you: in fact, you appear to be of the finest. You will, naturally, understand there is nothing personal in any of this. It is merely a matter of historic fact that Peter will marry Marie Baker.”

“Mr. Hedgerly,” she said, “I dislike you thoroughly. Furthermore, I’m not too certain that history is as solid as you think. Until further notice, then, I hereby accept Peter’s proposal of a moment ago.”

“Joan!” cried Peter, running forward, and folding the girl in his arms.

“Very fetching,” observed Hedgerly, with the air of a man observing the antics of a couple of goldfish in the proverbial bowl. “Considerable boundless and mutual enthusiasm, but both terribly and unhappily misdirected. In other words, a sheer waste of time and energy.”

Joan and Peter unclined and faced Hedgerly. “We like it,” they said in chorus.

Hedgerly nodded understandingly. “But Marie Baker wouldn’t.”

“Let’s go out, Peter,” pleaded the girl earnestly. “This unwelcome bird makes me feel like a female homewrecker!” Hedgerly beamed. “Do go,” he said. “And enjoy yourselves until I can locate Peter’s future wife—my grandmother.”

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The big machine should have been quiet, according to theory. It had no moving mechanical parts to hum or gears to clash, or levers to chatter. It had for its moving member a magnetic field that varied on a pure sine wave of intensity from a terrific flux-density in one direction through zero, and thence to an equally terrific flux-density in the opposite polarity. At one newspaper interview as the machine was being built some reporter had erroneously noted that the magnetic field strength at maximum was strong enough to affect the iron in your blood. This was intended for sheer hyperbole, but the fact remained that the magnetic field between the big pole pieces was strong enough to warp the path of light. Well, the shift *could* be measured with the most delicate of optical instruments.

Theoretically, a varying magnetic field should not make a sound.

Actually, it did. The field at maximum was strong enough to cause deep magnetostriction of the magnetic metals of the machine. They vibrated in sympathy with the varying field, their dimensions changing enough to set up sound waves in the air of the room.

So the theoretically silent machine actually made a clear humming roar that shattered the eardrums and seemed to press offensively on the skulls of those working within the chamber.

Even Peter Hedgerly found it oppressive after an hour or two, and he, of all men, should have been used to it.

He removed his eye from the observing telescope, and blinked to relieve the strain. He looked up at Joan, nodded affably, and his right hand snapped the main switch.

The terrible humming roar died. "Hello," he said brightly. "What brings you here?"

Joan Willson laughed sourly. She handed Peter a newspaper. Peter bent his head and read:

Personal! Marie Baker, Age 27, weight 114, brunette, brown eyes, minute scar on left thigh, Social Security Number 340-01-6077 please contact—

"I don't want her!" stormed Peter.

"The advertisement says you do," cooed Joan.

"Now look, Joan—"

She laughed and laid a cool hand on his cheek affectionately. "I know you don't. I did want to point out that your— grandson—is wasting no time."

Another voice interrupted. “Naturally not,” interjected Hedgerly. “After all, I’m here to see that things do go according to history.”

“History be damned,” snapped Peter. “I—”

“Really have very little to say about it,” smiled Hedgerly. “You’ll do exactly as... as I did!”

“Then,” blazed Peter, “why not let nature take its course? If I’m to meet and consummate matrimony with this Baker dame. I’ll do it!”

For the first time, Hedgerly looked less than the complete master of everything he surveyed. “It is also historic fact,” he said in a sepulchral tone, “that I add my efforts to history satisfy itself. You see,” he said, brightening, “how it all comes out!” He dug into his inside pocket and came up with a wallet. From it he extracted a newspaper clipping, yellowed and brittle with age. “Here is the original. I just copied it for the advertisement.”

Peter took the aged clipping and read it. His hands shook and the clipping fell apart.

“No matter,” smiled Hedgerly. “Its job is done.”

“Is done?” demanded Peter.

“Of course. Marie Baker will be at your apartment this evening.”

“I’ll scratch her bald-headed,” threatened Joan.

Hedgerly shook his head. “No, you won’t,” he said positively. Then he looked down at Peter, and his eyes ran over the experimental setup. “It won’t work,” he said to Peter. “You’re on the wrong track. It is impossible to accelerate and focus and direct the neutron. The neutron, possessing no charge, is therefore unaffected by either magnetic or electrostatic fields.”

Peter looked up quietly. “I’ve evidence to the contrary,” he said. “We believe that the neutron does possess a charge; that it is theoretically impossible for anything to exist without some charge, though the charge may be exceedingly minute. We believe the neutron to be possessed of a charge of plus or minus— depending upon the moment of intrinsic angular momentum— ten to the minus fifteenth electrostatic units less than that of the electron. Therefore—”

“You will find that the experimental evidence you get is impure,” said Hedgerly. “I’ll save time if you abandon this project.”

“Indeed? And what should I take up?”

“You’ll do history a better turn if you take to investigating the magnetic properties mass.”

“Is that a matter of history, too?”

Hedgerly shrugged. “If I told you all I know about it,” he said in a superior tone w made Peter want to commit homicide, “then you’d have too much time to sit around an frustrated because fate is a written book.”

“Spinach,” snorted Peter. His hand hit the main switch again and the humming ro leaped out at them from all sides. Peter grinned as he noted the wrist watch on Hedge arm. Unless the character had a one thousand percent nonmagnetic movement, the in by now would be keeping the devil’s own time.

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It was nine o’clock. For the eleventh time since dinner, Peter leaned out of his study a called, “Now?”

Hedgerly shook his head. “Not yet,” he said.

“Well,” said Peter this time. “Come in here. I’m on the trail of something.

“I know,” replied Hedgerly. “You’ve discovered the Hedgerly Effect.”

“The what?” stumbled Peter.

“Named after its discoverer. You’re quite famous in the future, you know,” replied Hedgerly.

“What is this Hedgerly Effect?”

“The one you’ve just discovered,” replied Hedgerly.

Joan Willson, present because of sheer curiosity pertaining to this Marie Baker creature whom she was prepared to dislike on sight, looked up from her book, and dra “Oh, brilliant repartee. You sound like that Cyril Smith routine that goes ‘Who’s he? Wh who? Him, the man in the picture. What picture?’ And so forth for about an hour.”

Peter smiled. “I suppose,” he said. “But it’s his fault, not mine. This effect is a so artificial generation of gravitic force.”

Hedgerly nodded. “The first historic discovery that proves the relationship between

magnetic phenomena and gravitic force. Now we're on the right trail," he concluded. Hedgerly walked over to the small barrette and mixed himself a drink. He lounged back against the bar and lifted his glass. "To my grandfather," he said. "The discoverer of the Hedgerly Effect!"

Peter looked at Joan weakly. "It's fratricide to kill a brother, patricide to kill a father, homicide to kill just anybody, infanticide to kill your son, but what is it to kill a grandson?"

Joan looked Hedgerly up and down and her lip curled in derision. "Insecticide," she snapped. "Ignore him. Maybe he'll go away. But Peter, what does this gravitic effect mean?"

"I'm not too certain," replied Peter wrinkling his brow. "Of course, since gravitic fields do act upon mass without charge, we can now filter out, accelerate, and focus the neutrinos or we will be able to, as soon as we get this effect refined. And if we can generate gravitic fields at will, we can nullify the gravitic mass or gravitic attraction of masses. That means a complete revision of all the mass-ratio tables pertaining to space rockets. In fact, it may do away with rockets entirely. And the following is conjecture, but may be possible:

"The reason that the limiting velocity is the speed of light is due to the fact that the mass approaches infinity as the speed of light is reached. That means that no possible energetic principle can be used to attain the speed of light, since this increase of mass is a statement of the mass-energy put into the article accelerated. In other words, Joan, to increase the velocity of anything to the speed of light requires that you pack into it the equivalent energy required to raise its mass to infinity. Meaning, of course, infinite energy."

"However, if this local generation of a gravitic field can be used to nullify mass, we can make a spaceship that need not increase in mass as its velocity increases."

"Providing that my reasoning is any good. This is just conjecture and guess. I don't know yet how much this gravitic generator will cover."

"You've done a fair job so far," said Hedgerly, mixing another drink. "Of course, you let it drop there."

"Let it drop?" yelled Peter. "With a thing like this at my doorstep? With the twinkling slide rule I can become the originator of interstellar travel, and you expect me to let it drop?"

Hedgerly smiled tolerantly. "The discoverer of the Hedgerly Effect does not become involved with space travel," he pointed out with a knowing air. "He does become the cornerstone for time travel, which we believe is as important."

Peter looked glumly at Joan. "Methinks of suicide," he groaned. "I invent time travel and for the next million years my invention becomes the curse of mankind. Pandora's box never let out any trouble-scorpion as bad as people like my temporally gadding grandfather."

“Now, grandpop, don’t be bitter,” laughed Hedgerly.

“Grandpop?” yelled Peter. “I’ll—”

The doorbell rang, interrupting a string of threats. Hedgerly stepped springily to the door, opened it, and said, “Please come in, Miss Baker. We’re expecting you.”

Peter whistled.

Joan hissed.

The room became three degrees warmer.

Miss Marie Baker was curvaceous. Miss Marie Baker was dressed to prove it. Miss Marie Baker knew it. The Petty-Girl calendar on Peter’s living room wall took on a drab, lumpy appearance, and on the table beside the divan, a magazine cover became blank as the model headed for the powder room.

Marie Baker spoke, and Arthur Sullivan moved in his grave because the sound of her voice was that reminiscent of that great Lost Chord of music. “I’m quite mystified,” she said.

Hedgerly took her slender hand. “Please come in,” he said. “And we’ll try to explain. You’ve come, Marie, to be introduced to your future husband!”

The door behind Marie filled again—and filled is the proper term. He stood six feet four, the floor creaked under his two hundred and twelve pounds of sheer muscle, and the litheness of his step carried him with pantherine grace. “May I point out,” he said in a voice that reeked of Harvard, Cambridge, and a complete disregard of the letter “R,” “that Miss Marie Baker may be already acquainted with her future husband?”

Hedgerly faced the giant. “Please,” he said in a pained voice. “I’m having enough trouble now without your unwelcome aid. Any relationship between you and Marie Baker must shortly become, at best, platonic.”

A small brass figurine of Rodin’s Discobolus took a sidelong look and made the brazen observation that being platonic with such as Miss Baker was an idea never suggested by his friend Plato. Plato had too much sense.

“Just how do you figure in this?” demanded the giant.

“Have we met?” asked Hedgerly.

“I’m Anthony Graydon. And my query goes still.”

“Pleased to know you, Mr. Graydon. I trust your intentions toward Miss Baker are simple?”

“Miss Baker happens to be wearing my engagement ring,” returned Graydon. Hedgerly looked, and saw a bit of glitter about the size of a small pigeon’s egg on her hand.

Hedgerly shook his head sadly. “May I introduce Miss Willson?” he suggested. “Willson, will you meet Mr. Graydon? Perhaps, Mr. Graydon, the no-longer-needed engagement ring will fit Miss Willson.”

Anthony Graydon looked down on the time-traveling man with grand contempt. “I have all the sheer, cockeyed assurance of an egomaniac,” he said. “Is Marie supposed to marry you?”

“Oh no,” explained Hedgerly. “She’ll marry him. Miss Baker, may I present Mr. Hedgerly. Marie, this is Peter.”

He took Anthony by one arm, and Joan Willson by the other, and steered them towards the door. “Let us leave them alone,” he said. “They must become acquainted.”

“Look,” snapped Anthony, “this has gone far enough—”

“Please,” interrupted Hedgerly, “this is serious. Miss Willson will tell you that what I say is true, however unwilling she is to face the bitter truth. It is only a matter of time before Miss Baker becomes Mrs. Peter Hedgerly.”

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The door closed softly behind the three of them before Tony Graydon turned to Hedgerly and said, “What kind of high-octane are you using in your crystal ball these days, Swami?”

“Swami? But please, this is not the work of a charlatan. This is historic fact.”

“Sure. So is my girl marrying that bird, huh?”

“They will marry,” replied Hedgerly.

“Yeah? That’s not very complimentary to me,” snapped Graydon. “I’ve been nursing one man with Marie for quite some time now. I hardly think—”

“Give them time,” replied Hedgerly succinctly. “In a short period, the propinquity which they are thrust—”

Graydon whirled Hedgerly around by grabbing both lapels of the coat in one large well manicured hand. “Propinquity!” exploded Graydon in full volume, which was enough to cause endless echoes up and down the corridor. Then even the echoes had echoes for a minute.

Joan Willson backed out of the way. The hand that enclosed both lapels of Hedgerly’s coat looked well manicured and in excellent care, but she had a firm hunch that *well-tended* included the matter of keeping it firm, hard, and dangerous. Graydon was a cream puff, and of a size where even a cream puff is respected.

But Graydon did not dust his knuckles off against Hedgerly’s nose. Breeding came first, the fore, and Graydon let the other man relax. “Propinquity,” he said in a level voice that sounded very firm, “presupposes that you and I, and possibly Miss Willson, are going to spend some time in hurling my fiancée and that character together.”

“Of course we are,” replied Hedgerly, with all of the assurance in the world.

“We—are—not!”

“Oh, but we are,” said Hedgerly. “And I’ll tell you why.”

Graydon smiled bitterly. “This,” he said to Joan, “is going to be good.” He looked at Hedgerly. “It had better be!”

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Marie Baker shrugged her shapely shoulders and looked very puzzled. “I don’t understand,” she said.

“Miss Baker, please let me explain,” pleaded Peter. She nodded, and Peter plunged into the explanation as completely as he could. Then—

“Peter,” she said quietly and very sincerely, “I’d hate to hurt your feelings, but I’m a little afraid that.. .that—” her magnificent voice trailed off weakly as she fumbled with the pint-sized diamond on her left hand.

Peter patted her shoulder. “I am glad you are a sensible woman,” he told her. “I’m a little rather taken up with Joan, you know.”

“Then what can we do?” cried Marie.

“I don’t know,” grumbled Peter. “This is the way I see it; he’s .. . uh... our grandsons and—” he looked at her curiously. “Uh.. .what’s the matter?” he asked suspiciously.

Her laughter came bubbling up from below the surface and it tinkled across the apartment like the sound and fragrance of a bubbling fountain. It was a genuine laugh and hearty and just long enough to be enjoyed. Then she explained: "I'm sorry—not re sorry about laughing, I mean, but look, Peter, have you ever considered that you and I been formally introduced by our grandson?"

"It sounds slightly indecent to me," grumbled Peter.

Marie shook her head. "If anything," she said quietly and sincerely, "is *fait-accompl* it is the very definite person of—our grandson."

"I'd been psychopathically avoiding that," he said. "Trying to ignore it."

"It looks," she began in a trapped voice, "as though we're stuck. If that bird is rea our grandson, we might as well give in. Come here, Peter, and hold my hand."

He took her hand gingerly.

"You may kiss me, Peter."

"Thanks," he said dryly. "I'll keep your offer open until a more propitious date. Meanwhile, Miss Baker, I'll continue to feel slightly angry at being told what to do, where it, and with whom. Even though the Book of Acts is complete down to the final decima

Marie laughed cheerfully again.

He looked at her curiously. She stopped laughing. She leaned forward gracefully offered him her right hand again. "Shake," she said.

He shook.

"Now," she said seriously, "let's at least be friends. I'm not inclined to take to be hurled at any man's head. I might add 'either.' But if this Book of Acts is the complete t seems to be, we'll find it out soon enough. But," she said leaning back against the diva won't marry any man I do not love. And I happen to love Tony."

Peter nodded. "I happen to love Joan Willson," he said. "Until I change, we'll let continue that way."

"OK," chuckled Marie Baker. "Gin Rummy!"

"Right," said Peter, reaching for a deck of cards.

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Graydon looked at Hedgerly across the top of his glass. "If you're from the future," he said, "you could do some real chipper things."

Hedgerly nodded. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "You believe that I have advance dope on the stock market and other items for speculation."

"Well?"

"I have. Of course, my time happens to be some sixty years after now, understand?"

"Perhaps, what are you driving at?"

"I'm trying to tell you," said Hedgerly, "that if I help you amass a fortune on speculation, this will be known fact by my time."

"So?"

"So," said Hedgerly, "the only thing I've done—the only thing that is historic fact—that which I'm going to do for proof. Just one thing."

"Go on."

"I'm going to write something on this envelope. Then I'm— Wait. We'll do it. I can't be prepared."

He wrote a sentence on the flap of the envelope and handed it to Joan. "Keep it safe, carefully," he told her.

"Now," he said to Graydon, "There will be a big nine-event day at Bay Meadows tomorrow. I have here a listing of nine horses. You will put a sum of money on these nine horses and you will become famous as the first man ever to win a complete nine-horse parlay."

"Interesting, if true," said Graydon, looking over the list. "We'll know tomorrow."

"We'll go out to the track tomorrow," said Hedgerly.

"What about Marie and Peter?" asked Joan.

Hedgerly smiled. "True love," he said, "never runs smooth. Peter and Marie are playing Gin Rummy now, and both of them agreeing that they'll have none of this. But propinquity—"

The low growl in Graydon's throat stopped him cold. Perhaps his history told him to stop.

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The roaring hum of the generator made speech difficult but not impossible. Marie, with pencil in hand, was interestedly recording the data that Peter was calling to her. His lip brushed her ear occasionally, because it was necessary to get the figures across through the din. The brush of lip against ear was not unnoticed; under the circumstances it was hard to ignore anything, even the least minute of personalities. Finally he snapped the switch and the roar died.

"That's it!" he said exultantly.

"It's beyond me," said Marie, looking dazedly at the solid bank of figures she'd written down.

"That's because you've never been exposed to the stuff before. Come on—I'll show you."

He snapped the safety switch and watched the last dying flicker of the radiation counter above the control panel. Then he pressed a button and a huge door creaked open. He led Marie along a zigzag hallway, explaining, "Radiation products, like all Chinese Devils, travel only in straight lines."

Then, inside the shielding, she saw the generator.

"This made that terrible racket?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I'd hate to be inside here when it's running," she said nervously.

"Me, too," he grinned. "But I daresay the radiation would kill you long before the door did."

"Oh!" she gasped, getting the implication of the dangers of nuclear physics in one gulp.

"This," he said, "is brand new. In the center is a small, thin-walled brass container filled with radon gas, and suspending a cloud of finely divided beryllium. This produces neutrons. Very slow neutrons, not worthy of mention compared to most nuclear reactions. However this is but a source, instead of a complete deal."

“The neutrons emerge from the container in all directions, but are urged into motion by a swift, increasing pulse of gravitic force. It used to be magnetic, but it is now gravitic. We’ve changed it over, according to my findings of recent work. Then, with the neutrons moving in a cloud, we alternate the gravitic field, varying it from attraction to repulsion. Like a cyclotron uses radio-frequency energy in the Dee Plates, we use gravitic energy to accelerate neutrons.

“Probably doesn’t mean too much to you,” he said with a smile. “But for the first time in history we can hurl a beam of neutrons of any desired range of energies at a target of any desired cross-section.”

“It must be important,” smiled Marie. “It is so complicated.”

“Sophistry,” he grinned. “Remember those ‘nonsense engines’ that were full of spools, levers, gears and stuff; all working furiously, but producing nothing?”

“‘A tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing,’” quoted Marie.

“Sort of like our friend Hedgerly,” grinned Peter.

* * * *

“Speaking of the devil,” came a voice. Hedgerly came in through the winding passage followed by Graydon and Joan Willson, who came last. Joan passed through the group and she could take Peter’s arm. “Peter,” she said. “I’m wealthy.”

“So?” he said.

“Hedgerly produced a nine-horse parlay at Bay Meadows. Mr. Graydon... Tony, that is... put down a ten-dollar bill on it in my name. I’m now possessed of about sixty-three thousand dollars.”

Ignoring the statement, Peter squinted at Joan and asked, “It’s ‘Tony, that is’, no?”

Graydon scowled faintly. “Let’s all be stuffy,” he said.

“Sorry, Graydon,” said Peter. Graydon nodded. He thought he understood. He tried to, anyway. As irking as the situation was to him—having this character Hedgerly blithely hurling his fiancée at Peter’s head, and callously telling everybody else that they might as well give up trying to change Fate—he believed that Peter and Marie both were more than irked at being hurled together. Peter was not a boor, nor even stuffy.

Joan filled the silence. “That isn’t all,” she said. “Last night Hedgerly wrote this in an envelope before he gave Tony the horses to pick. It says: ‘Graydon will place ten dollars on the parlay in Joan Willson’s name, and she will win sixty-three thousand, four hundred dollars and sixty cents.’ That’s what happened, Peter.”

“Um,” said Peter.

“Trapped,” said Marie.

“Gypped,” growled Graydon.

“Bought,” muttered Joan.

“I’ve told you again and again,” said Hedgerly, “that no matter what you do, you’re doing just what history said—note the past tense—you did! Even to producing a means of controlling neutrons, Peter. Now, of course, you’ll continue here, though this being the Theoretical Physics Laboratory, you’ll let this information disperse. The other boys will pick it up and develop it while you continue to delve into the relationship between magnetism and gravities.”

“And suppose I do not?”

“Oh, but you did.”

“Not,” growled Peter, his voice reaching a crescendo, “if I go nuts first!”

Hedgerly spoke quietly to Marie. “You take care of him,” he told her. “There’s no one else like it for cementing a fond relationship.”

“Must I give up my life work?” exploded Peter angrily. “I’d rather work on this generator than eat! I’ve got me a lead that may end up by making me as famous as Faraday or Einstein, and if I follow it, I’ll end up so far behind the eight-ball that it’ll look like a split pea!”

Marie leaned back against the frame of the generator and smiled at him. “This,” she said in a voice dripping with phony tones, “is a shock to me. Men usually brave fire and brimstone to touch the hem of my skirt. But you’d rather give up being historically famous than—”

“Shaddup,” snapped Peter. “And let me think!”

“Think?” muttered the girl helplessly. “I think we’re licked.”

Peter nodded. “Licked, drawn, and quartered. Y’know, Marie, I’ve tried to resent you, but I can’t. Probably because I know you’re in the same boat as I am.”

She nodded. “Whatever he does, whatever we do, he’s got the answer and he got it one hundred per cent. No man in his right mind would ever have stood up to Tony and him to reduce his feeling toward me to platonic friendship. Not unless he knew beforehand that Tony wouldn’t half-kill him. But I am beginning to understand. Even though what he is odious, I must admit that it does come to pass.”

Peter looked unhappy. “This is a fine mess,” he said. “It wouldn’t be half bad if Hedgerly and his confounded history were capable of changing our feelings as well as our lives. But he blithely ignores the fact that you and I are expected to marry—with both of us feeling that we’d rather marry someone else, and know who. Then, to top that, not only is it going to be emotionally difficult in the first place, but think of the emotional wrench we’re going to have when Tony and Joan—” Peter stopped, swallowed hard, and then added, “I’m not speaking too selfishly, Marie. I’ve not mentioned how they will feel. The whole thing is a trumped-up mess.”

Marie put her hand on Peter’s arm. “I don’t exactly love you,” she said with a shy smile, “but you are a very nice guy, Peter.”

“Huh?”

“You’re sensitive and gentle and thoughtful of other people’s feelings. I have a hunch that you could also be very hard and rough if the need arose.” “

Peter smiled a little crooked smile and said, “All of which gets us nowhere, does it?”

“No,” admitted Marie. “But if I’m going to have myself hurled into an ‘arranged’ marriage, I’d rather it be with someone I respect.”

* * * *

Hedgerly leaned over the back of the divan in Peter’s living room and looked from Joan to Tony, one on each side of him. “What’s so wrong with it?” he asked. “People have been happy in prearranged marriages for centuries. Sometimes the participants never meet until they are introduced by the minister.”

Tony looked up sourly. “Hedgerly,” he said, “you may have traveled back into time. But mister, you didn’t come THAT far back!”

Hedgerly shook his head impatiently. “I fail to see why people rant against their fate. It is written that Peter and Marie get married. It is also written that they celebrate their golden wedding anniversary—shucks, I was there as a kid, and I know. They were very happy together.”

“So?” demanded Joan.

“So you might as well give up,” said Hedgerly. “As I told Peter when I arrived a few days ago, I’ve come to help him. The chances are that things would have gone off all right if I’d not come. Peter and Marie would have met, regardless. As for you and Tony, Joan might tell you that you were very happy together, too. So you might as well give up completely and accept the dictates of fate.”

“I hate to go through the motions of a play for nothing,” grunted Tony.

Hedgerly winked at Joan. “You’ll find some of the motions are fun,” he said.

The door opened and the other couple came in. Hedgerly looked at them and smiled genially. “Have fun?” he asked. His tone was that of an indulgent father.

Peter looked vague. “We’ve been sitting and talking.”

“No better way of becoming acquainted,” smiled Hedgerly. He leaned back over the divan. “Let’s go out and leave them alone,” he said in a low, quiet voice.

Tony shook his head. “I live in strict bachelor quarters,” he said. “And Joan could not have a visitor at this time of night. And I’ll not go out and sit on a park bench so that so-and-so can make time in a comfortable living room with my fiancée.”

Hedgerly shrugged. “This, then, is one time when four’s company but five’s a crowd. He said good night all around, and then left, knowing that the two couples would talk for hours, and each word would bring better understanding.

For this was it.

Hedgerly went to his hotel and called a private airport. “I want two planes ready to be hired for a quick trip to Yuma,” he said. There was answer. “No, I’m not hiring both. I’m only hiring one. I’m telling you that there will be another party inquiring. You’ll see that they’re satisfied. Let them know when they do. I’m going in the second plane.”

Then, because he knew he’d be up most of the night and early morning. Hedgerly went to bed.

* * * *

Back in Peter’s living room, there was not a quiet discussion. It was an armed rally.

“I’ll speak plainly if I can,” said Peter, striding up and down. “And when I miss a point, someone can call me on it.”

"I don't know what you're after," said Tony, who was holding Marie's hand in a manner that should have disturbed Hedgerly's sleep. "But I'm for it."

Peter smiled. "Hedgerly is supposed to be my grandson," he said. "I'm to marry Marie. We are to celebrate a golden wedding. Fine and dandy. Now look: the one weak point in Hedgerly's wild story is the question of why he came back."

"Because it is so written," suggested Joan.

"Fine," grinned Peter. "Now leaving all personalities out of this for the moment, Marie, if you were introduced to me at a party, would you be interested in me?"

"Perhaps," she said. "On the other hand, Peter, you're not a spectacular chap. One must really know you before one can see what makes you tick. Then they're not certain they wouldn't know, really."

"But how do you feel now?"

"Resentful! As much as I know and admit that you are a fine man, Peter, I feel as though I were being forced into a duty that offered little compensation."

Tony nodded and then said, "Look. I can sum this all up, I think. Peter, you are welcome to enter my home at any time. You can even be known and recognized as my wife's best friend."

"Just so," interjected Joan, "he doesn't get too friendly."

Peter grinned. "We're a long way off of the track," he said. "This is as much a time-cliche as the fiction about the man who stabbed his father. The joker is, what do you think about it?"

"What can we do?" asked Joan helplessly.

"All we have to do is to foul him up just once," said Peter. "If he doesn't come back to annoy us, then Marie and I may never meet."

"In other words," said Tony, "the pattern is complete only when Hedgerly comes and interferes."

Peter nodded. "Either we live by accident and die by accident, or we live by plan and die by plan. If our lives are written in the Book of Acts, then no effort is worth the candle. There will be those who will eternally strive to be good and yet shall fail. There will be others who care not nor strive not and yet will thrive. Why? Only because it is so written. And by whom? By the omnipotent God. Who, my friends, has then written into our lives both the

good and the evil that we do ourselves! He moves us as pawns, directs us to strive against odds, yet knows that we must fail, because he planned it that way. For those, then, that there is everlasting hell.

“So,” said Peter harshly, “I plan that this goldfish shall try to live in air.” He plunged his hand into the aquarium and dropped a flipping fish onto the table. “I direct that this goldfish shall try to live. See, it strives hard to live in an unfriendly medium. It fails—of course, because the goldfish is incapable of following my dictate.”

Peter’s face took on an angry expression. “It has failed to obey me,” he thundered. “Ergo it must be punished!”

He lifted a heavy letter opener and chopped down, cutting off the head of the still-gasping fish.

“And that,” he said bitterly, “is predestiny!”

“All of which proves—?” asked Marie.

“Hedgerly exists,” said Peter. “But suppose Hedgerly exists only as a probability, a probability that he himself has made high. You see, there is always the probability that a man will meet any woman. Suppose the outcome of this probability was strong enough to insure the outcome—Hedgerly—to invent time travel, and then come back here to insure the probability?”

“I think I see,” said Joan with a twinge of doubt.

“Well, all we have to do is to be darned sure that his own particular probability does not occur. Then he won’t occur, and all of this will not occur, and we—”

“Look,” said Tony excitedly, “it may be grasping at straws, but it seems to me that there is nothing that is as certain as your friend. . . your, ah, grandson... Hedgerly claims should require a lot of outside aid.”

Marie brightened, and then looked glum. “There’s one thing that we all forget,” she said unhappily. “We’re speaking of predestiny as though we were a bunch of people going through the lines of a play. That may or may not be so. Let’s face it, predestiny means that we may or may not know what our next move may be. We do not know, and there seems to be no way of finding out. Therefore whether or not our acts are all written need not take away the fun out of life.”

Tony faced her in surprise. “Just what are you advocating?” he demanded.

She reached up and took his hand. “Tony, never doubt that I love you. Yet Peter

nice fellow, and had I met him first I'm reasonably sure that we could have been happy together."

"All right," nodded Tony. "Granted that love is a matter of coincidence, of the desirable factors of personality, propinquity, and propitiousness, so what?"

Marie looked unhappy. "He... Hedgerly... did win a nine-horse parlay, didn't he?"

"Yeah."

"He is here."

"Indubitably—and damnably!"

"Well," concluded Marie, "it is distasteful, but it seems ordained. And when—like going to the dentist—you're faced with something distasteful, there's little point in fuming over it. Do it—and forget it!"

Joan jumped to her feet. Then she sat down, dejected. "Beating my head against a wall," she said. "All right. I give up."

Peter thought for a moment. "Look," he said brightly, "sometimes people must take their chances. Sometimes people gotta ride close to the edge in order to gain safety. I suggest that we all elope to Yuma and have a double wedding!"

Tony advanced upon Peter with fire in his eye. "You're going to let that character walk away with this?" he demanded. "I'll kill him first."

"No," said Peter, shaking his head. "That won't remove the truth of his birth. What must be done is to prevent it in the first place!"

"By going through with it?" snorted Tony.

"We can all hope for a last-minute reprieve," said Peter. "And until we're shotgunned into it, we can always have a double wedding with the cross-couples getting married. You see, Hedgerly claimed there hadn't been either a divorce or a death-and-remarriage in the family for generations. Now the thing we gotta do is to get married to whom we want, and the way we can even come close is to get close enough to a preacher to have him do the ceremony. All at once and no one first. Finis, conclusion."

Tony nodded slowly. "Me, I've been half-psychopathically afraid of any gentleman since the cloth ever since Hedgerly turned up," he said. "So we can all go and be certain that our other is irreparably and thoroughly committing nonretractable matrimony. Then pooh for Grandson Hedgerly!"

Peter went to the telephone and dialed the number of the private airport. Ten minutes later they were on their way to the port, and when they arrived they looked carefully, but not see the odious one. They paid no attention to the other plane idling in the background.

* * * *

Hedgerly arrived as they took off into the blue. His plane was waiting, and he leaped in quickly and told the pilot to follow the other plane.

“What’s the hurry?” grinned the pilot.

Hedgerly smiled a sly smile. “It’s a very long tale,” he said. “But the summation of it is that there are two couples in that ship who intend to get married.”

“Double wedding, huh?”

“Right. That’s what they intend.”

“And are you the irate father, the angry brother, or the jilted lover?” grinned the pilot. He gunned the engine, and the plane roared down the tarmac and lofted. The pilot was in no time in following the other plane. When the roar of the engine diminished for flying, the pilot turned to Hedgerly, who was obviously waiting for a semblance of silence before he spoke.

“I’m none of those,” he said with a smile. “I’m merely a very interested character whose future depends upon seeing the right thing done.”

“Such as?”

“Well, Party A wants to marry Party B, while Party X wants to marry Party Y. This is not to be. However, it must be that Party A marries Y whilst Party B marries X.”

“Clear as a Raymond A. Chandler plot,” grinned the pilot.

“Well, they’ve been trying to outwit me for quite some time,” remarked Hedgerly. “Right at the present time, they’re heading for this double wedding. The trouble is that they’re so befuddled and worried about doing the wrong thing that they’ll pay no attention to what the preacher is saying.”

“Who does?” laughed the pilot.

“It would be better for their little plot if they did,” said Hedgerly with a sly grin. “For all I see, I’m going to see that the preacher marries the proper parties.”

“How?”

“I know how. You see, I’ve known about this plan of theirs for quite some time. I know how it will come out. There will be a lot of confusion once this double ceremony is over and they think they’re safe. While this confusion is going on, the preacher-man will be handing out the wedding certificates. He will, of course, have forgotten the correct names of the newly married ones. He will look up—and he will see me. I will tell him that I arrived a little late at the festive event, but can I be of help? Let’s not annoy the happy people with details. You’re confused? Then permit me to supply the details.”

“Yeah?” said the pilot, interested.

“Then I’ll supply the necessary details to make certain that the marriage certificate handed to Tony Graydon will state that he is solidly wedded to Joan Willson; conversely, the certificate handed to Peter Hedgerly will irrevocably state that he is to have and to hold the death do him part from Marie Baker *Quod erat demonstrandum!*”

“Think there’s a good probability of your getting away with it?”

“An excellent probability,” stated Hedgerly. “This, chum, is it!”

* * * *

Hedgerly arrived as the festivities came to a close. Quietly, he slipped into the back door of the cottage and walked through the house until he came to the parson’s study. There he waited until the gentleman arrived, and then he said, “I am a relative of one of the fellows involved, sir. I seem to have been late for the big occasion, and I’d rather not interfere at the present.”

The parson looked up and nodded genially. “Not even to kiss the brides?”

“Later,” grinned Hedgerly. “Doubtless the brides are being very well kissed right now?”

“Thoroughly. I see your point.”

“Yeah,” drawled Hedgerly with a smile. “I’ve often thought it was a strange way to seal a fidelitous wedlock—for the bride to go around bestowing kisses on all and sundry men.”

“My point exactly. The man to kiss the bride is her new husband and none other. You are a discerning man, sir. I don’t know—”

“Hedgerly. A not-too-distant relative of Peter Hedgerly.”

“Then you know the names of all of them?”

“Known them for years.”

“Fine. Then you can help me with their names. Mind?”

“Not at all,” smiled Hedgerly. “They are Peter Hedgerly, Marie Baker, Anthony Graydon, and Joan Willson.”

The parson put the names down and then turned to his desk. He picked up a rather heavy script-pen and started to write the names in on the dotted lines in a heavy, ornate script. Finished, he arose and said, “Come on, Mr. Hedgerly.” He waved the certificate saying, “I like to write these things in with a heavy flourish. It seems to give them more or taste or whatever than merely scrawling the names in common handwriting.”

Hedgerly followed at a little distance. He wanted to see Peter’s face when the young man read the certificate and found out who he was really married to. Furthermore, Hedgerly wanted to be there to point out who was wedded to whom and why.

Peter accepted the certificate and put his arm around Joan with a fatuous expression. Tony kissed Marie. They all started for the door.

Hedgerly ran forward, but the parson stopped him. “Hedgerly,” he said, “you make one mistake. Never, never, never, try to hurl any woman at any man’s head. They both love it. And never, never, count on anything as being certain. And always, when you’re trying to juggle the future, be certain of the true ancestry of those who have a definite part of it. Give you a lift, Hedgerly, for I’m going your way, but not as far.”

“But... but—”

Parson Hedgerly smiled. “Two couples,” he said, “happily married to the right people—by their own son! Yeah, Hedgerly, you’re not the only one who has a good probability of being. But your probability is slipping from decimal point to decimal point now—and I doubt that you are even a shadow of your present self by the time we finish our trip back home.”