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# The Stolen Mind

*By M. L. Staley*



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Written by  
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Astounding Stories of Super-Science, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1930)  
W.M.CLAYTON, Publisher HARRY BATES, Editor DOUGLAS M.DOLD,  
Consulting editor

Transcription: Yan Viana  
Published in: [www.atomicvintage.com.br](http://www.atomicvintage.com.br)  
Email: [atomicvintage10@gmail.com](mailto:atomicvintage10@gmail.com)

"WHAT caused you to answer our advertisement?" Owen Quest felt the steel of the quick gray eyes that jabbed like gimlets across the office table.

"Why does any man apply for a job?" he bristled.

Keane Clason gave an impatient smile.

"Come!" he said. "I'm not trying to snare you. But there were unusual features to my ad, and they were put there to attract an unusual type of man. To judge your Qualifications, I must know just why this proposition appeals to you."

"I can tell you that," nodded Quest, "but there's nothing unusual about it. In the first place, I knew that the Clason Research Corporation is the leading concern of its kind in the country. In the second place, this seemed to offer a way to obtain a substantial sum of money quickly."

"Good," said Clason. "And you feel that you have all the necessary qualifications?"

"Decidedly. I am 24 years old, athletic, and of an earnest and determined nature. Moreover, I have no family ties, and I'm willing to run any reasonable risk in order to improve the condition of my fellow men."

Clason smiled his approval.

"You say you need money. How much immediately?"

Quest was unprepared for the question.

"A thousand dollars," he ventured.

Without hesitation Clason counted out ten one-hundred-dollar notes from his wallet and laid them on the table.

"There's your advance fee. You're ready to go to work immediately, I hope?"

"Certainly," stammered Quest.

Stunned by the swiftness of the transaction, he sat staring at the money that lay untouched before him.

To accept it would be like signing an unread contract. But he had asked for it; to refuse it was impossible. Even to delay about picking it up might arouse Clason's suspicion. Already the latter had turned away and was opening the door of a steel cabinet. Quest had one second in which to reach a decision. . . . He crammed the currency into his pocket.

WITH delicate care Clason set two objects on the table. One looked to Quest like a miniature broadcasting tower or a mooring mast for lighter than air craft. The other was a circular vat of some black material, probably carbon. Within it a series of concentric tissues were suspended from metal rings, and in a trough outside ranged four stoppered flasks containing liquids of as many different colors.

"Look at these models carefully," said Clason. "They represent two of the most remarkable discoveries of all time. The one on your left is the most destructive weapon known to man. The other I consider the most constructive discovery in the history of science. It may even lead to an understanding of the nature of life, and of the future of the spirit after death.

"Both of these were developed by my brother Philip and me together—but we have disagreed about the use to which they shall be put.

"Philip"—the inventor dropped his voice to a whisper—"wants to sell the secret of the Death Projector—the tower, there—as an instrument of war. If I should permit him to do that, it might lead to the destruction of whole nations!"

"How?" demanded Quest. "I've heard of a device called the Death Ray. Is this it?"

"No, no," said Clason contemptuously. "Even in a perfected state the Ray would be a child's toy compared to the Projector. This is based on our discovery that invisible

light rays of a certain wave-length, if highly concentrated, destroy life—and our additional discovery that if these are synchronized with short radio waves the effect is absolutely devastating.

"We obtain the desired concentration of invisible light by using a tellurium current-filter under the influence of alternate flashes of red and blue light. The projector can literally blanket vast areas with death, up to a top range of at least five hundred miles.

"Just picture to yourself what this means! In a space of ten minutes two men can lay down a circle of destruction a thousand miles in diameter; or they can cut a swath five hundred miles long in any desired direction."

"HAVE you ever proved it?" demanded Quest skeptically.

"Yes, young man, we have," snapped Clason. "Right here in the laboratory—but on a minute scale, of course. However, there's no time to demonstrate now. The point is that my brother is determined to sell if he can obtain his price for the invention. He argues that instead of bringing disaster upon the world, this machine will forever discourage war by making it too terrible for any civilized nation to consider. In spite of my opposition he has opened negotiations with an ambitious Balkan power. He may actually close the sale at any moment!

"However," Clason drew a deep breath, "you see this other device? Simple as it appears, it is the key to the whole situation. We can use it—you and I—to overcome Philip's will and prevent this unthinkable transaction. The two of us can do it. Alone I would be virtually helpless."

"Why not have the Projector confiscated or destroyed by our own Government?" suggested Quest. "That seems to me the only safe and sure way out of the difficulty."

"You simply do not understand," frowned Clason impatiently. "Philip is selling the plans and descriptions of the machine, not the machine itself. Even if this model and

the larger test machine that we have built were destroyed—even if I were willing to have Philip sent to Leavenworth for life—he could still sell the Projector.

"But this other invention, our Osmotic Liberator, makes it possible for me to gain control of Philip and actually change his mind, through the medium of an agent. I have hired you to act as my Agent, Quest, because I can see that you are a young man of unusual character and vitality. And by way of reward I can promise you both money and a brilliant future."

THE inventor poised in a tense attitude on the edge of his chair as though his body were charged with electricity. His eyes seemed to dart out emanations that set Quest's blood to tingling. Then for a moment the latter lost consciousness of his physical self. It was as though he had opened a door and found himself suddenly on the brink of a new and totally strange world. He dispelled this fancy by a quick effort of the will, for he knew that he had a delicate problem on his hands and that it must be solved within a very few minutes. However, he proceeded, he must act without disloyalty to his Government, and at the same time without injustice to Keane Clason.

"Tell me," he said in a husky voice, "how do you intend to use me? I do not believe in Spiritualism. I would be a poor medium."

Clason gave a short laugh. "You are not to be a medium in that sense at all. Spiritualism as practiced is just a blind sort of groping and hoping. Osmotic Liberation, on the other hand, is an exact and opposite physicochemical science. Here—I will show you."

Into the outer cell of the Liberator he emptied the purple vial, and so on to the innermost, which he filled with a golden-green liquid like old Chartreuse.

"The separating membranes, you understand, are permeable by these complicated solutions. Each liquid has a different osmotic pressure and therefore should, under normal

conditions, interchange with the others through the membranes until all pressures are equalized. I prevent such interchange, however, by maintaining an anti-electrolysis which retards ionization and thus builds up what might be called osmotic potential.

"NOW if an Agent—yourself, for instance—submerges himself in the central cell, at the same time maintaining a physical contact with his Control at the surface of the liquid, and if then the osmotic potential is suddenly released by throwing the electrolytic switch, the host of ions thus turned loose in the outer compartments make one grand rush for the center solution, which contains the cathode.

"Under these conditions your body becomes a sort of sixth cell, and your skin another membrane in the series. Properly speaking, however, you are not a part of the electrolytic circuit but are merely present in the action. Your body acts as a catalyser, hastening the chemical action without itself being affected in any way. Physically you undergo no change whatever; but in some strange way which is, like life, beyond analysis, your mind flows out into the solution, while your unaltered body remains at the bottom of the tank in a state of suspended animation.

"If no Control is present, all that is needed to return your mind into your body is a throw of the electrolytic switch back to negative, whereupon you emerge from the tank exactly as you entered it. But with your Control present and in contact with your submerged body, your mind, instead of remaining suspended in the solution, flows instantly into his body and resides there subject to his will.

"This can not be done, however, unless the wills of Control and Agent have first been brought into accord. To accomplish that, we clasp hands"—Quest grasped Clason's extended hand—"and look steadily into each other's eyes.

"Now, it is well known that the vibrations of an individual's will are as distinctive as the sworls of his fingerprints. What is not so well known is that the frequency of vibration in one person can be brought into accord with that in another.

"YOU consciously retract your will by concentrating your mind upon the thing which you know I wish to accomplish. Gradually while we continue in this position your vibrations speed up or slow down until they acquire exactly the same frequency as my own. We are then in accord, and when your mind is liberated in the tank it is in a state which admits absorption into my body. And it is subject to my will because you have purposely attuned it to my peculiar frequency. Immediately after the transfer there will be a brief conflict, due to the instinctive desire of your will to obtain the ascendancy. But of course mine will gain the upper hand at once, since both wills will be in my frequency."

Quest felt, rather than saw, a wall of alarm closing in on him. He tried to avert his eyes, to withdraw his hand from Clason's grasp. With a nostalgic pang in the pit of his stomach he suddenly realized that he could not do so. He had gone too far—farther than any man in his position had a right to go. Having deliberately weakened his will, it seemed now to have deserted him entirely. A prickling sensation coursed up his spine, his extended arm went numb, his hand trembled violently.

"Splendid!" said Clason, suddenly releasing both eye and hand. "Just as I foresaw, you will be able to attune yourself to my vibration-frequency with hardly an effort. Now please remain seated; I'll be back in a moment."

FOR a second after the door closed, Quest remained slumped in his chair. Then he was on his feet, shaking himself like a wet dog to free himself from the spell under which he had fallen. Something about Clason attracted and at the same time repelled him, fraying his nerves like an irritant drug and confusing his mind at the moment when he needed the full alertness of every faculty.



Invisible light—disembodied minds—will vibrations! Nothing there to get hold of. Were these things real or imaginary? Was Keane Clason a great inventor, or a madman? Would Philip prove to be a real or an imaginary scoundrel? Should he summon help, or go on alone?

Professional pride said: wait, don't be an alarmist! With his knuckles Quest tapped the table, half expecting it to melt under his fingers. The feeling and sound of the contact gave him a peculiar start. On the farther end of the table stood a letter-box—an invitation. From his pocket Quest snatched a slip of paper, and wrote:

*6 stroke 4—9:45A—Hired. If no report in 48 hours, clamp down hard.*

To address a stamped envelope and slip it in with the outgoing mail was the work of seconds. But he was none too quick. He had just dropped back into a lounging attitude when the door burst open and Clason flew into the room.

"We must act instantly," hissed the inventor. "Philip plans to close the transaction within a day."

In spite of himself, Quest jumped upright in his chair. Clason tapped him on the shoulder reassuringly.

"It's all right," he smiled, "I'm ready for him. We'll make our move this afternoon and beat him by eighteen hours."

"Let's see." He paused. "Oh ! yes. I I was about to explain to you that as soon as the will of the Agent enters the body of his Control, the latter can again transfer it into the body of still another person."

"Now you understand why I advertised for a man of exceptional character? As my Agent, I want you to enter the body of Philip, and your will must be strong enough to conquer his in the battle for mastery which will begin the instant you intrude into his body. You will still be under my control, but your will must be strong enough on its own

merits to overcome his. I can direct you, but your strength must be your own. That's clear, isn't it?"

"I THINK so," said Quest slowly. JL "But what becomes of me after you have frustrated Philip's plot?"

"That's the easy part of the process," smiled Clason; "but naturally you feel some anxiety about it. I simply withdraw your will from Philip, return it to your own body, and pay you a reward of ten thousand dollars."

"You're sure you can?"

"Perfectly. I have merely to touch Philip's hand to recapture your will. Then I immerse myself in the tank with the switch at plus. The osmotic action will extract both wills momentarily from my body. But the presence of two bodies and two wills in the solution together forces a balance, and each will seeks out and enters its own body. Then you and I climb out of the tank exactly as we are this minute."

"If it weren't for my belief that anything is possible," Quest shook his head, "I'd say that your claims for this invention were ridiculous."

"And you couldn't be blamed," admitted Clason readily. "This toy of a model is hardly convincing. But come along with me and I'll show you how the Liberator looks in actual operation."

THE office rug concealed a trap door which gave upon a spiral stair. Below, Clason unlocked another door and led the way through a narrow and tremendously long passage lighted at intervals by small electric bulbs. Presently another door yielded to the inventor's deft touch and closed behind them with a portentous chug. Here the darkness was so utter and intense that Quest imagined he could feel the weight of it on his shoulders. From the slope of the passageway and the muffled beat of machinery that had

come to his ears on the way along, he guessed that he was below ground in some chamber at the rear of the factory.

He gave a low exclamation as Clason switched on the toplight. No wonder the darkness had seemed of almost supernatural quality! Even the hard white glare of the daylight arc was grisly. Its rays rebounded from the liquids of the great circular tank in a blinding dazzle of color, while the dull black walls and ceiling were so perfectly absorptive that beyond arm's length they became to all effects invisible. Even the ledge on which he stood—the shoulder of the vat—gave Quest the feeling that to move would be to step off into a bottomless pit. But Clason took his attention at once, pointing here and there in his quick, nervous way to indicate how faithfully the Liberator had been reproduced from the model. In all respects the arrangements were the same, with the addition that here a long plank like a spring-board extended out from a wall-mount as far as the central compartment of the tank, and that from its end a narrow ladder hung down to the surface of the Chartreuse liquid. A double-throw switch fixed to the wall above the base of the plank was evidently the source of electrolytic control.

"When you throw the switch to plus," said Clason, pointing to the chalk-marked sign above, "you produce the violent electrolytic action needed to bring about a liberation. All the rest of the time it should be closed at minus, in order to maintain the anti-action which I explained to you.

"Now let's rehearse, so that when the time for the real performance arrives we can be sure of running it off without a hitch."

"All right, sir," nodded Quest, so dazed by the glittering light that he was hardly conscious of what he said.

"FIRST," said Clason, running lightly up the steps to the plank, "you walk out to the end, like this, and start down the ladder. Then you lower yourself into the tank. The

liquid is at body temperature; it's neither strongly acid nor caustic; it will cause you no injury or discomfort whatever.

"Meanwhile I keep in contact with your hand until the instant that you become submerged. Now your mind is in me, see?—ready for transfer into Philip, where it will act as my Agent. That's how simple it is! Come on up and we'll go through the motions."

Quest experienced a shiver as he mounted the bridge. Annoyed with himself, he shrugged the feeling off. There was no risk here. Moreover, it was a part of his daily work to take chances; he had done so a hundred times without hesitation. Now he moved all the more quickly, as if to belie the squeamishness that possessed him in spite of himself.

Swinging past Clason on the plank, he lowered himself without a pause to the bottom rung of the ladder, while the inventor, hanging head down, maintained contact with him.

"No need to stay here," he said in sudden irritation. "I understand perfectly what I am to do."

"I'm testing my own acrobatic ability," grunted Clason amiably. "Just a minute now."

He wriggled as if trying to adjust himself to a better balance, but in reality to mask the motion of his free hand, with which he reached up and pressed a button in the side of the plank. Instantly the structure, pivoting downward on its wall-socket, plunged Quest to his waist in the osmotic solution.

"For God's sake get out of the way!" he shouted, trying to wrench his hand out of Clason's sinewy grip. "Let go, I tell you!"

But Clason clung like a leech, his teeth gritted under the strain. Again the plank lurched downward, and with a violent splash Quest vanished below the surface.

Quick as a cat, Clason scrambled up the ladder and back to the base of the plank, where he erased and interchanged the chalk-marked signs with which he had misled Quest. Then with a sinister twist of a smile he threw the switch to minus, and turned to watch as the plank slowly righted itself and the vacant ladder came clear of the liquid.

For some time he stood staring at the gleaming colored rings of his dissociation-vat like some witch over her cauldron, his lips working, his hands clasping and unclasping like the tentacles of some sub-sea monster. Then, as if the spell had suddenly broken, he turned on his heel and switched off the light. As he hastened down the passageway toward his office, the airlock sucked the door against its jamb with an ominous whistle.

IN a twinkling, as Quest's shackled spirit writhed in its new housing, he knew that he was in bondage to a scoundrel. Formless and voiceless, he still fought madly for the freedom which the instinct of ten thousand generations made necessary to him. At the same time he was furious at himself for having been tricked like an innocent schoolboy. The plank socket, the button which had tripped the supporting spring, the fake rehearsal, the tuning of his will to that of Clason—step by step the whole cunning scheme unfolded itself to him now.

But what could be the purpose behind this villainy? Only one answer seemed possible. Keane must be the one bent on selling the Death Projector, Philip the one who wished to frustrate the fiendish transaction! And Quest of the Secret Service—he was to be the tool to force the sale.

With the soundless scream of rage Quest's will hurled itself against Keane's. The two met like infuriated bulls, and for an instant too brief to be pictured as a lapse of time they poised immovable. But two wills can not exist on equal terms in a single body, and in this case the vibration of both was that of Clason. Quest had challenged the Master Will. He could do no more. It hurled him back, crushed him like foam, compressed him

to the proportions of an atom in the background of his consciousness. So brief and unequal was the conflict that in the next breath Clason had all but forgotten the presence of the stolen will within him. When he was ready to use his Agent, that would be time enough to summon him!

Despite this suppression, Quest began to see dimly through strange eyes, and to hear vaguely with ears that were not his own. Feelers, tentacles, some intangible kind of conduits carried thought impulses to him from the Master Will. He received these impressions vividly, but those which he gave off in return were so weak, due to the subjection of his will, that Clason was entirely unconscious of any response. Quest was not enough of a scientist to be astonished at the ability of a disembodied mind to experience sense impressions in the body of another. He was only glad that the darkness and silence were growing less. Very, very slowly he was awakening to a new kind of consciousness—the consciousness of another person's Self. He hated and loathed that Self, yet it was better than the awful blankness that had gone before.

SUDDENLY, as light grew brighter and sound more clear and definite, a new element entered—the element of hope. At first it was feeble: its only suggestion was that sometime, somehow, he might escape this prison. But it was like water to a parched plant. It caused his will to expand, to extend its feelers, to press up a little more bravely against the crushing pile of the Master Will.

Now another surprise sprang upon him. He was moving! That is, Clason's body was moving in some kind of a conveyance, which was threading its way through crowded streets. Stores, buildings, buses, people—Quest remembered them all distantly as things he had known thousands of years ago. The driver turned his head, and his profile seemed vaguely familiar.

Now a rush of foreign thoughts drowned out his own. They were a sort of overflow from the mind of Clason. They thronged along the conduits that bound the two wills together, but only Quest was conscious of the movement.

Keane's mind was on his brother Philip: that much was particularly clear. And there was something about a telephone call. Yes, Keane had telephoned to the police, disguising his voice, refusing to divulge his name. He had said that a man by the name of Philip Clason was in trouble and had told them where to find him. Then the police had telephoned the factory, and Keane had pretended astonishment and alarm at the news. That's why he was here now—he was on the way to confer with the police. And he was chuckling—chuckling because he had fooled Quest and the police, and because now the hundred million dollars was almost in his grasp.

Cutting in close, the car turned a corner and drew up before one of a row of loft buildings in a section of the city which Quest failed to recognize. As Clason stepped to the sidewalk, Quest was more painfully aware than ever of his powerlessness to influence by so much as the twitch of a muscle the behavior of this hostile body in which he had permitted himself to be trapped. In his weakness he felt himself shrinking, contracting almost to nothingness under the careless pressure of the Master Will.

CLASON glanced casually at his watch, and three men converged toward him from as many directions. There was nothing to distinguish them from anyone else in the street, but along the conduits it came to Quest that they were detectives and that they were there by appointment with Keane Clason.

"What floor?" asked the latter, with an excitement which Quest felt instantly was pure pretense. "Are you sure they haven't spirited him away?"

"Don't worry," replied the leader of the detectives. "The alley and roof are covered. We'll take care of the rest ourselves."

On tiptoe they climbed three long flights of stairs in the half-light. Clason held back as if in fear. He was a good actor, and Quest felt the shrinking and hesitation of his body as he crouched and slunk along in the wake of the detectives, pretending terror at what was about to happen, though he knew—and Quest knew he knew—that there would be no resistance up there—that Philip would be found alone exactly as he had been left by Keane's hired thugs.

On the top landing Burke, the leader, paused to count the doors from front to rear.

"This is it," he whispered to the bullnecked fellow just behind him.

The other nodded, and crouched back against the opposite wall while his companions placed themselves in position to cross-fire into the room the moment the door gave way.

QUEST longed for the power to kick his hypocrite of a master as he still held back, cowering on the stairs, playing his fake to the limit. Then the door flew in with a splintering shriek under the charge of the human battering ram, and across it hurtled the other two detectives in a cloud of ancient dust.

"Here he is!" someone shouted.

"Phil! Phil!" Keane Clason's voice fairly quavered with sham emotion as he ran into the room and threw himself at a man tightly bound to an upholstered chair, which in turn was wedged in among other articles of stored furniture.

But Philip was too securely gagged to reply, and as Burke slashed the ropes from across his chest he dropped forward in a state of collapse. Stretched on a couch, he soon gave signs of response as a brisk massage began to restore the circulation to his cramped limbs. Suddenly he sat up and thrust his rescuers aside.

"What time is it?" he demanded with an air of alarm.



"One o'clock," replied Keane before anyone else could answer, patting his brother affectionately on the shoulder while within him Quest writhed with indignation. "By Jove! Phil, it's wonderful that we got to you in time. Really, how—you're not injured?"

"No," grunted Philip, "just lamed up. I'll be as fit as ever by to-morrow."

"If you feel equal to it," suggested Burke, "I wish you'd tell me briefly how you arrived here. Do you know the motive behind this affair? Did you recognize any of the body-snatchers?"

PHILIP frowned and shook his head.

"Yesterday noon," he said slowly, "I took the eight-passenger Airline Express to Cleveland on business. There were three other passengers in the cabin—two men and a woman. Right away I got out a correspondence file and was running over some letters. The next thing I knew I was approaching the ground in the strangest state of mind I ever experienced. My head was splitting, and everything looked unreal to me. Seemed as if I was coming down on some new planet."

"You mean the ship was gliding down to land?"

"No, no. I was dangling from a parachute. ... By the way, where am I now?"

"In a Munson Avenue loft."

"In Chicago?"

Burke nodded.

"I guessed as much," frowned Philip. "You see, I came down in a field, and then before I could free myself from my trappings I was pounced on—trussed up and blindfolded—by a gang of men. I knew they had taken me a long distance by automobile, but I saw nothing more until they tore the blindfold from my eyes when they left me here."

"And they were all strangers to you?"

"Yes— those that I saw."

"Isn't this enough for just now, Burke?" interrupted Keane, and Quest received an impression of uneasiness that was not apparent in the inventor's tone. "After a good rest he's sure to recall things that escape him now."

"Just one minute," nodded the detective, turning back to Philip. "Can you think of no plausible reason for this attack? Is there no one who might possibly benefit by putting you temporarily out of the way?"

Philip gave a frightened start. Then he was on his feet, clutching at his brother's arm.

"Keane!" he pleaded, "Keane! What's happened? I know, I know! It's the Projector."

"Water!" roared Keane, and Quest felt the panic that coursed through him as he tried to drown out his brother. "Somebody bring water! He needs it!"

At the same time he snatched up Philip's hand in a grip of steel. Instantly the latter's wild eyes became calm, the flush passed from his relaxing face, and he slumped down weakly on the couch.

IN that fleeting moment Quest surged into the body of Philip and confronted his will with a fierce and triumphant ardor. For now his will would have command of a body with which to fight his fiend of a Control.

With a sensation of contempt he met Philip's resistance and buffeted him ruthlessly backward, crushed down and compressed his feebly struggling will. And as Philip yielded, Quest felt his own will expanding to normal, taking possession of the borrowed body with hungry greed, and flashing from its faded eyes the spark of youth.

Burke stared in amazement at the kaleidoscopic rapidity of the changes in the rescued man's expression. Strange lights and shadows continued to flit across Philip's face

as Quest's invasion of him proceeded, but with a diminishing frequency which soon assured Keane that his Agent was tightening his command.

The younger of Burke's aides stood\* fascinated, his mouth agape. The other spoke guardedly to his superior:

"Dope, eh!"

"Nah!" replied Burke, shrugging himself out of his trance. "Shock."

The actual duration of the conflict in Philip was something less than three seconds. It would have been more brief if Quest had exerted himself to the utmost. But his sensations as he first surged into this new habitat under Keane's propulsion were so weird and unearthly that for the moment he was lost in the wonder of the experience. For that short time, therefore, Philip was able to fight back against the onrush of the invading will.

In the next second Quest became conscious of the resistance. Urged on by his Control, he must push Philip back and quell him; but his sympathy for his opponent and his hatred of Keane roused him to sudden revolt. He wanted to disobey the Master Will, retreat, leave Philip in command of himself. But he could only go on, unwillingly thrusting back Philip's will despite the indescribable torment and confusion in his own. Then, with the feeling that he was ten times worse than the most inhuman ghoul, he took full possession of his borrowed body.

"I'll take him home now," said Keane composedly to Burke. "As you see, he needs a little extra sleep. Meanwhile, if you have any occasion to call me, I will be at the factory."

TO the youthful mind of the Agent, used to the lightness of an athletic physique, the body in which it moved down the stairs to the limousine seemed strangely heavy and awkward.

"I'm badly done up, Keane," he said with Philip's lips as the car got under way.

"Bah!" snorted Keane, "you've had a scare, that's all. Go to bed when you get home and sleep till nine this evening. At ten a man named Dr. Nukharin will call for you. He will drive you to a garage, leave the car, and transfer to another one a few blocks away.

"Out near Marbleton you will find an airplane staked in an open field. Nukharin is a capable pilot. He will fly back southeast along the lakeshore to the meeting place. You should arrive about twelve-thirty. The test is set for one o'clock."

Quest listened in a state of abject rage. Lacking the power to resist his Control, he could only boil away in Philip's body like a wild creature hemmed in by bars of steel.

"Bring with you," continued Keane venomously, "the set of papers that you took from the safe in my office. Hold the other set in readiness to deliver to Nukharin tomorrow, after he has studied the results of the test and has notified Paris to release a hundred million dollars in cash for delivery at your Loop office at 3 p. m."

The murderous greed of the man maddened Quest. He tried to revolt, his will squirming like a physical thing, threshing the ether like a wounded shark in the sea. For a moment he felt that he was about to burst the bonds that his demon of a Control had woven around him. So violently did he resist that the immured and sporelike will of Philip forged up fitfully out of the blackness and joined his in the hopeless struggle. But along the attenuated conduits that still chained Quest to the Master Will Keane caught the impulse of the mutiny, and his eyes darted flame as he countered with a will-shock that paralyzed his unruly Agent.

"Listen! you whimpering dog," he snarled. "Think as I tell you—and nothing more! You are going to apologize to Dr. Nukharin for your previous unwillingness to sell the Projector. You are going to tell him that I am at fault—that I held out—but that you found a way to force my compliance. You understand?"

Quest could find no words. With Philip's head he nodded meekly. Just then the car stopped and the chauffeur threw open the door.

DR. NUKHARIN flew high despite the masses of cumulus cloud which frequently reduced visibility to zero. He had merely to follow the rim of the lake to his destination, and an occasional glimpse of the water was sufficient to hold him on his course.

In the back seat hunched Philip, his body crumbling under the weight of Quest's despair. For hours the latter had gone on vaguely hoping somehow to thwart this horrible transaction that was rushing the world to its doom, thinking he might grow strong enough to wrench himself free and so liberate Philip from the dominance of his conscienceless brother. Even though such a move should leave his own will forever separate from his body, he was ready and anxious to make the sacrifice.

Suddenly the crash of the motor ceased and Nukharin banked' the ship up in a spiral glide. Quest had never been in the air before, and the long whirl down into the darkness on this devil's errand was to him as eery as a ride to perdition in a white-hot projectile.

His mind seemed to trail out in a great nebular helix behind the descending ship. He felt that he had suddenly crossed some cosmic meridian into a new plane of existence, where he was changed to a gas, yet continued capable of thought. But even here his obsession remained the same. Keane Clason—trickster, traitor, arch-criminal—must be destroyed!

"I'll get him!" vowed Quest in words that were no less real for being soundless. "I'll trail him to the end of space and bring him to account!"

THEN wheels touched earth and the cold, bare facts of his destiny rushed in on him with redoubled force. He felt the nearness of his Control seconds before he perceived him through the eyes of Philip. With a sensation like a stab he realized that now he mvzt

speaking, play his part, be any bloodless hypocrite that Keane Clason chose to make him. The silent order surged down the conduits promptly enough; he responded as an automaton obeys the pressure of a button.

"Well, Doctor," chuckled Philip with a cunning leer, "here's the magic tower, just as I" promised you. We'll run it up in a jiffy. This test is going to be so vivid and conclusive that not even a hard-headed skeptic like you can raise a question."

"You misunderstand me," returned Nukharin in an injured tone. "So far as I am concerned this procedure is only a formality, but it is none the less necessary. Suppose that I should spend a hundred million of my government's money and the purchase prove worthless? You may guess that my folly would cost me dear."

Keane Clason was waiting on the platform of a giant truck, the motor of which was idling. All the apparatus was in readiness except that the three demountable sections of the tower had yet to be run up into position.

"One of the beauties of the D. P." said Philip gleefully to the Doctor, while Keane smiled slyly to himself, "is that this pint-size dynamo provides all the current needed for the test. We pick the power for our radio right out of the air by means of a wave trap and mensurator invented by this bright little brother of mine," and he clapped Keane patronizingly on the back.

"Yes, ah—Dr. Nukharin," ventured Keane timidly, and at that moment Quest experienced the raging red hatred that causes men to murder. "Philip has promised me that you will employ this device only as a threat to hold the ambitions of the larger powers in check."

"Of course, of course!" replied the Doctor heartily. "But now let's have the test. Even at night I'm not too fond of these open-air performances."

THE height of the tower as they ran the upper sections into place was forty feet. When all connections had been inspected, first by Keane, then by Philip, the former led Nukharin aloft.

As the climax of his plot approached, Keane's excitement bordered on a cataleptic state, hints of which came confusedly through the conduits to Quest. With a peculiar satisfaction he felt that Keane was suffering. The inventor's jaws became rigid, as though his blood had changed to liquid air and frozen him, and he had difficulty in controlling the movements of his arms.

Now he was afraid! Genuinely afraid, this time. Quest caught the impulse too clearly to doubt its meaning. This was no sham! Keane was doubting his own machine, fearing that in the crisis some element in the finely calculated mechanism might fail to operate, thus cheating him of the blood-money on which his heart was set. Then he was speaking, and even Nukharin noticed the tremor in his voice:

"These nine tubes, which look like a row of gun barrels, are molded from silicon paste. Each shoots a beam of invisible light and a radio dart of precisely the same wave length. The destructive effect depends chiefly upon this exactness of synchronization."

"A question occurs to me," said the Doctor: "will others be able to manipulate the machine as successfully as you can?"

"It's fool-proof," chattered Keane, almost losing control of his voice, "absolutely fool-proof. Surely you have scientists in your country who can follow written directions! Nothing more is necessary."

"Very well," shrugged Nukharin. "I only want to be sure that no unforeseen difficulties may arise in an emergency."

"See this range-setter?" continued Keane. "The thread on the vertical shaft enables us not only to limit the range by angling the beams into the ground, but it can also be disengaged and the Projector revolved in a flat circle for maximum ranges."

"And is there no danger of the machine going wrong—of destroying itself and us?" suggested Nukharin.

"None whatever, Doctor. There is no explosive force and no great electrical voltage involved. As long as we stand back of the muzzles we have nothing to fear.

"Now look. I have set the micrometer at three hundred yards, which will just about cover the stretch between ourselves and the lake. I will cut a swath for you—and every bush, every blade of grass, every insect in this swath will be withered to ash in the twinkling of an eye. The destruction will be absolute."

"Please proceed," said Nukharin grimly.

KEANE pulled a lever in its slot, then pressed it down into its lock as his projection battery swung lakeward at the desired angle. Then with one hand poised on another lever, he pressed an electric button.

At the controls below, a bulb flashed on and off. The signal was superfluous, for already Quest had received his silent command from the Master Will. An icy dread fastened on him. He must obey the unspoken command; he had no will of his own with which to resist. The test would be a success; the Projector would be sold; the world would be turned into a shambles. And he, Owen Quest, would be the destroyer, the murderer, the weak fool who made this horror possible.

All this flashed through the Agent's mind in the fraction of a second that it took him to extend Philip's hand, close the switch of the dynamo, and snap on the alternating lights in the housing over the tellurium filter.



For an interminable five seconds he waited, in a ferment of revolt which the paralysis of his will made it impossible to put into action. Then again the command pulsed within him, the signal bulb flashed, and he reversed his motions of the moment before.

Cold sweat cascaded down Philip's face as Quest felt the ladder vibrating under descending feet. He longed for the power to hurl Keane Clason to the ground and turn the Projector upon him. But with an awful irony the Master Will forced him to his feet, and to speak in a tone that withered the manhood within him.

"Come," said Philip in a triumphant tone to Nukharin, "and I will show you that Clason inventions perform as well as they sound."

Flashlight in hand, he started toward the lake with Nukharin and his brother close behind him. Twenty paces, and the long meadow grass suddenly vanished from beneath their feet.

"See that!" whispered Philip excitedly, waving the light from side to side to show the forty-foot swath that stretched away before them. "Not a trace of life left, not a blade of grass—nothing but dust!"

The only response was a gurgling sound that issued from Nukharin's throat.

"Look!" Quest formed the word with Philip's lips under the urge of the Master Will. "Here was a tall bush. What do you see now? Just a teaspoonful of ash. When you examine the remains by daylight, you will find that even the root has disintegrated to a depth of two feet."

"Enough of this," croaked Nukharin in horror. "The deal is closed."

His face was convulsed with fear. Without another word he whirled about and fled toward his airplane. Philip gave a start as if to follow.

"Halt! you slob," growled Keane, whose composure had returned with the successful outcome of the test. "I have use for your company, even though you are as great a coward as our Slavic friend."

Coward! The epithet stung Quest like a flaming goad. One of the fine, intangible lines that bound him under the will of Keane Clason severed, and his own will exploded into action like a thunderbolt. With startling agility he whirled Philip about, the flashlight clubbed in his hand. But Keane was quicker still. A clip on the wrist sent the weapon flying. Then Philip reeled backward from a kick in the stomach, and his clutching hands beat the air as he sank unconscious in the dust.

WITH a violent tug, Quest lifted Philip's body to a sitting posture. The phone was ringing, and by the pull on the will-fibers he knew that Keane was at the other end of the wire. Philip's body was failing under the strain of the part it was forced to play, and the blow of the night before had further weakened it. Now he sat rocking his head painfully between his hands. But Quest lifted him to his feet by sheer will, and he staggered across the room.

"Hello!" he said in a hoarse voice. "Get the hell out here to the factory!" rasped Keane, and the crash of the receiver emphasized the command.

It was one o'clock as Philip whirled his sedan into Olmstead Avenue. At three, reflected Quest as the car scorched over the pavements, he must be at the downtown office to deliver the papers and receive the money.

Then he was face to face with Keane, reeling dizzily at the hatred that blazed from the latter's accusing eyes.

"Double-crossed me, eh!" The voice was a low snarl, and as he spoke Keane thumped the extra outspread on his desk. "But you're not going to get away with it—neither of you!"

Dismay, hope, dread, wonder robbed Quest of the power to speak. But he whirled around behind the desk with such unexpected violence that Keane staggered back in alarm. Then he was devouring the screaming headlines of the newspaper. Three seconds, like a slow exposure, and every word of the Record's great scoop was etched upon his mind as if with caustic:

## **DOOM LAUNCH ADRIFT ON LAKE**

Physician Baffled by Condition of Five Bodies Found in Craft

Blighted Area on Shore Said to Have Bearing on Tragedy

*THAW HARBOR, IND., June 6.—Five Chicago sportsmen, most of them prominent in business and society, perished in the early hours this morning while returning in the launch of A. Gaston Andrews from a weekend camping party near Hook Spit on the Michigan shore. The boat was towed into this port at daybreak by the Interlake Tug Mordecai after being found adrift less than a mile off shore. According to Captain Goff of the Mordecai the death craft carried no lights and he barely avoided running her down. The weather along the Indiana shore was perfect throughout the night and there is nothing to indicate that the launch was in trouble at any time. The bodies are unmarked, and this little community is agog with rumors ranging all the way from murder and suicide to the supernatural.*

*Dr. J. M. Addis of Thaw Harbor, the first physician to examine the bodies, says that they appear to have suffered some violent electrochemical action the nature of which cannot be determined at the moment. This statement is considered significant in view of the reported discovery ashore of a large blighted area almost directly opposite the point where the launch was found. Joseph Sleichert, a farmer who lives in that vicinity, reports that this patch of ground extending back from the lakeshore was completely stripped of*

*vegetation overnight. He ascribes the damage to some unknown insect pest. Others say that the condition of the ground indicates that it has been burned at incinerator temperatures. Nothing is left, of the soil but a blue powder.*

Philip faced his brother with eyes that were dull with agony.

"You have made me a murderer!"

Quest forced out the words in painful gasps.

But Keane snapped back at him like a rabid dog.

"You did it—you did it yourself! You tampered with the Projector. You tried to spoil the test. You changed the range. You tried to kill me, and instead you killed these others. And you're going to pay—both of you. You hear me?—you're going to pay!"

His voice mounted the scale to a scream. It was a wail of unreasoning terror, of the dread of exposure, of the fear that he would fail to collect the fortune now so nearly in his grasp. The accident that had jarred his welllaid plans had unnerved him.

FRANTICALLY Quest strove to answer him, to explain his utter subjection as Agent, to say that if he had possessed the will to oppose or trick him he would have turned him over to the police, or might even have killed him, at the very outset. But in his frenzy, Keane had so tightened his control that Quest was speechless. Now he tried to substitute gesture for words, but Philip was rooted to the spot like a statue; even his hands were immovable.

He might have remained in this state indefinitely had not Keane's fears withdrawn his mind from his immediate surroundings. Momentarily he forgot Quest, Philip—everything but himself and his predicament. And in the instant that his vigilance relaxed, Quest's enslaved will experienced a sudden lease of strength and hope. Independently of his Control, he found that he could move Philip's hand, could take a faltering step.

But now, what to do? How might he fan this feeble spark of volition to sufficient strength for decisive resistance? The idea came to him: if only he could place distance between himself and Keane, perhaps with one titanic effort he might launch himself against the Master Will, take him by surprise, crush him down, and reverse him to the status of Agent instead of Control. With infinite effort Quest forced Philip's body step by step across the room. He must reach that window, get a signal of distress to someone in the street.

But Keane began to sense a mutiny. He followed. He crossed the floor with slinking, tigerish steps and snaking body. His wet lips writhed back over his teeth, and his contorted features wove the leer of the abyss. Now as his Control drew physically near, Quest felt his mite of strength ebbing fast. Slowly Keane reached up with his clawed fingers and grasped his Agent by the arm.

"Remember!" he hissed, "if these deaths are traced to us, you break down—you confess—you take the blame—you paint me lily white—you describe the cowardly means by which you moulded me to your will—you plead only for a quick trial and the full penalty of the law. You understand?" Quest made no reply, but he understood all too well the hideous intention of his betrayer. What a fool he had been to imagine that Keane Clason would ever restore him to his body! Philip to the chair, Quest a homeless spirit wandering in space, and for the body at the bottom of the tank, the brief regrets of the Department!

A SUDDEN rushing sound filled the air with a sense of action and alarm.

Two—three—four speeding automobiles swung in recklessly to the curb and shrieked to a standstill under smoking brakes. Men leaped out and deployed on the run to surround the factory. Keane darted to the door and twisted the key.

"Come on!" he spat at Philip as he snatched back the rug and threw open the trap door.

The command galvanized Quest to action. In two bounds he had Philip on the stairs. A heavy impact rattled the office door just as he dropped the trap into place over his head. Then, infected with Keane's panic, he was running down the passageway like mad.

Inside the tank chamber the brilliantly colored rings of liquid flashed back the rays of the arclight. Half crazed with anxiety, Keane danced on the black ledge like a monkey on a griddle. His face was ashen, drool ran from his twisted mouth, his eyes were two black pools of terror.

Again Quest experienced the peculiar sensation which came with the slackening of control. New hope sprang up in his agonized being as heavy blows boomed against the airlocked door. Great waves of fear poured along the conduits, betraying to the Agent the state of mind of his Control. Now what would Keane do? What could he do? Why, of all places, had he fled down into this blind burrow?

Thud, thud! Then came a series of sharp reports. Outside, they were trying to shoot away the deep-sunk disk hinges.

Still the door stood fast, but the fury of the assault on it whipped the faltering Keane to action. In a bound he was on the platform. With a lightning hand he threw the switch to plus, starting electrolytic action in the tank. Then he pressed a button concealed under the edge of the switch-mount and a panel slid silently aside in the wall, revealing a narrow outlet.

TO Quest everything went a flaming red. He might have known that this fox would have something in reserve—a way of escape when danger threatened!

But his Control gave him no time for independent thought. He forced Quest to turn Philip's eyes, up to his own. Without disconnecting that grip of his glittering eyes, Keane leaped back to the ledge. Quest felt the silent order:

"Get up on that plank! Dive into the tank! Get back into your own body, let Philip have his! Then come up—the two of you—and face the music. For I'll be gone, and your story will sound like the ravings of a maniac."

Quest took an obedient step toward the platform. But at the same instant a tremendous crash shivered the door. It seemed to unnerve Keane Clason. With a gasp he sank down upon the steps, his body doubled in pain, his hand clutching at his heart. Another crash followed, and he shuddered and cried out.

Instantly Quest felt an expansion of the will. Keane's sudden physical weakness had loosened his control. Philip's lips worked painfully as Quest forced him to pause, to disobey the command of the Master Will. In a spasm of will he fought to wrench himself free from the countless clinging tentacles of his Control. In great surges, Quest's reviving volition pounded against the walls of his borrowed body. Now he sought to force this sluggish body back to the wall, so that he might release the airlock and spring the door. But Philip seemed to ossify, every cord and muscle of his body frozen to stone by the conflict that raged within him.

Braced against the wall, Keane was rising slowly to his feet. His seizure was easing, and so he was able to exert a better pressure upon his rebellious Agent.

"Come!" he gasped, realizing that he lacked the strength to escape alone and must therefore change his plan. "Lift me—quick! Carry me out! Slide the panel back into place. We will escape together!"

THE spoken command turned the balance against Quest. His will yielded to the master. At the same instant Phillip's body relaxed like an object relieved of a great excess

of electrical potential. Suddenly strong and supple, he lifted the trembling Keane and tossed him across his shoulder. For a moment there had been a lull in the assault on the door. Now the battering resumed with a fury that jarred the whole chamber and sent ripples dancing across the varicolored liquids in the osmotic tank.

"Quick!" gasped Keane. "Move! I say. Carry me out."

But he was in a fainting condition. Crash after crash rocked the chamber, and with every blow Quest's will felt a stimulation that enabled him to stand off the commands of his Control. Then a wave of nausea swept over him and left him reeling. It seemed that Philip's blood had turned to boiling oil. A dazzling mist swallowed him up, and with a weird sense of inflation he felt full strength returning to his will.

A booming blow that bulged the door inward acted upon him like a stage player's cue. He leaped to the platform. The gurgling sound of remonstrance rattled from Keane's throat. But Quest paid no heed. Philip was walking the plank—away from the open panel—out over the tank.

Rapidly he dropped down the ladder to the bottom rung, snatched Keane's wrist in a gorillalike grip, and hurled him down into the vat.

Then Philip was clinging desperately to the ladder, his strength gone, his body shivering as if with ague.

"Go on up!" came a strange, impatient voice from below him. "For heaven's sake let me out of here!"

A DOWNWARD glance, and with a shout of alarm Philip was scrambling up the ladder, for there was a head down there, and a pair of naked shoulders, and the face of a man he had never seen before. Hand over hand Quest followed. Philip had collapsed and lay prone on the plank. Quest lifted him to his feet and shook him anxiously.

"Philip!" he urged. "Philip! Can you walk?"



The tattoo on the battered door helped to revive the older man.

"Quick!" whispered Quest, kneading Philip's arms. "There's barely an hour left. Get to your office. Burn the papers. Refuse the money. Do you hear me?"

Philip nodded dazedly.

"Hurry!" puffed Quest, thrusting him through the opening that Keane had reserved for his own escape, and sliding the panel back into place.

Quest was himself now—young, strong, free. Instantly he threw the electrolytic switch to minus. For Keane had failed to emerge from the tank, and since he was submerged alone, he could not escape until electrolysis was halted.

Just as Quest leaped from the platform to release the airlock, the door burst in and three men with drawn guns rushed into the chamber.

The leader stopped with a startled oath and stood blinking his unbelieving eyes. Quest was poised like a statue, his naked body gleaming an unearthly white against the lusterless black of the wall.

"Quest," came from the three in chorus. Then a rush of questions: "What's the matter? What's happened to you? Where are the Clasons?"

Quest turned toward the platform, expecting to see Keane.

"Something's wrong!" he shouted. "Quick! Somebody get Philip. He's gone to his Loop office. Keane Clason's at the bottom of this tank. I'm not sure how this thing works, but Philip can get him out! I'm sure of it!"

DESPITE the confident predictions of both Quest and Philip Clason, osmotic association failed to restore Keane to life, and at last the coroner ordered the removal of the body. The autopsy revealed heart disease as the cause of his death.

For reasons best understood at Washington, the cause of the five launch deaths was withheld from the public. Quest's punishment for his part in the crime consisted of a promotion and a warm personal letter from the President of the United States.