

CLASSICS TO GO

AMAZING

TALES
VOLUME 89



ROG PHILLIPS et al.

Amazing Stories

Volume 89

Rog Phillips

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The Lost Ego

Rog Phillips

He knew he existed—even to the point of knowing his own name. But to really exist you have to have a body—and he couldn't find his!



"So what if I did spend this week's household allowance getting drunk last night!"

I stared at the woman. For a brief second I had felt that she was my wife. But I had never seen her before. I looked at her. She was a straw blonde, rather pretty in a way.

"Give me some more money, you cheapskate," she sneered. "I don't know why I ever married you. I could pick up a half a dozen any night that are more fun than you ever were."

She couldn't be talking to me. I looked around to see who she was talking to. I was standing on the rug of a living room. No one else was in the room except us.

"All right," I heard myself say. My voice startled me, it was so quiet, so calm and patient. I'd heard someone speak just that way once. Who was it? I remembered suddenly. It was when I was six years old. I was in the neighborhood store when it was held up. The hold-up man had pointed a gun at Mr. Kaseline. Mrs. Kaseline had run into the store from in back and screamed at the man with the gun. He had shot her, then ordered Mr. Kaseline to hand over his money. I had been crouched against the wall, watching. Mr. Kaseline had looked down at his dead wife. Then he looked at the hold-up man, and said, "All right," in that same tone. Then he had opened the cash register and from somewhere in its depths brought out a gun and started firing at the man. He had kept on shooting until his gun clicked on an empty chamber....

"How much do you want?" I asked.

She blinked at me, a worried frown creasing her forehead. I sensed a stab of fear go through her. She averted her eyes uncomfortably. "Whatever you want to give me," she said sullenly.

It was weird. I had never seen her before in my life. I had no idea who she could be. Whoever she was, I didn't like her.

I looked about the room once more. I couldn't recognize a single thing. I tried to. I studied things like the davenport, the pictures on the wall. Nothing was familiar.

I became conscious of her eyes studying me with a mixture of expectancy and fear, tinged with a little finger of contempt that was ready to run if I looked her way. Anger and irritation flooded into me. I had to get out, to think.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," I said, starting toward the front door.

"Where are you going?" she asked sharply.

I stopped and turned toward her slowly. That calmness was in my voice again as I listened to it. "To try to borrow some money," I said.

I opened the front door and went out, closing it gently behind me. I was on a porch of red enameled concrete. There were three steps down to the walk. I had never seen them before.

It was evening. Somewhere down the block a woman was calling someone named Johnny. Across the street a man was going up the walk to the house from his car. Next door a skinny man with a large Adam's apple was mowing the lawn. He saw me and waved at me. A nervous smile flitted over his lips.

"Hi, Orville," he called.

But my name wasn't Orville, and I had never seen these houses, these people. I had never before been in this neighborhood.

Or had I? Was it possible to have amnesia while in familiar surroundings?

I considered the possibility, then rejected it. I was positive I had never been here before. I was certain my name wasn't Orville.

I knew who I was, and I knew my name was Fred Martin. Why, ten minutes ago I had been....

The man across the street had just opened the door to enter the house, but now neither he nor the house were there. In their place was Thordsen's bench. Around me were the dim outlines of the lab.

I tried to remember what I had been doing. I turned to my bench and groped for the light switch.

Light bathed my bench. I looked at the scattered parts of the computer, and grunted with relief. Of course! I had come back to the lab after dinner to work some more.

I started to take off my coat. Sudden doubt made me pause. I went slowly over to the corner medicine cabinet and looked at my reflection. My face looked back at me. I needed a shave. But my face was familiar. It was undoubtedly mine. Still....

I groped in my coat pocket and found it empty. I patted my hip pocket, and took out my wallet. I flipped it open and searched the driver's license for my name.

The name written there was Orville Snyder.

In that moment a strange emotion of detachment settled upon me. Almost disinterestedly I looked at other identifications. Each bore the signature of Orville Snyder.

Yet I was not Orville Snyder. I was Fred Martin....

"Now look here, Fred," I said aloud. "Something's wrong." I grinned, but I knew it wasn't funny.

I went to the mirror again and studied my face. It was the same face I had seen there a minute before. I tried to detach myself, to make it seem a strange face. I couldn't. It was my own face.

I went back to my bench and frowned down at the scattered parts. Tube banks, condensers, resistors, switches. I had laid them out myself before going out to eat, so they would be ready when I returned.

"Now let's see," I said aloud. "I distinctly remember laying them out. Thordsen was talking to me at the time. We were discussing the feedback principle in this circuit. Then he left. I went to the supply room to get that extra tube tank. Then I went out to ... to...."

I had come to a blank wall in my memory. I couldn't remember going out.

I knew I had been here before I was in that room with the strange woman. I was sure of that. Then I had gone out on the porch and the man next door had called me Orville. Then I had been here, with no passage of time between the two. Just a fading out and fading in—like they do with some scene changes on television.

And in my hand was a wallet with identifications for Orville Snyder. One of them—I turned to it and studied it again—said he was an employee of Rexlo Research Corporation with the classification of scientist.

But / was an employee of Rexlo Research with the classification of scientist—and there were only two others with that classification. Thordsen and Mintner. We three worked in this lab. No one else. Certainly no one by the name of Orville Snyder. Unless—I smiled uneasily—unless / were Orville Snyder.

I went over to my bench and sat down, cupping my chin on my fists. I tried to reason it out. My memories were perfectly clear. I went over them again and again, trying to find something significant.

It was possible I had never left the lab. That scene with the strange and unlikeable woman could have been an illusion. Maybe I fell asleep and dreamed it, then woke up.

That didn't explain the "proof" in my wallet that I was a man named Orville whom I had never heard of before, but the only other explanation of the blanks was that I had blanked