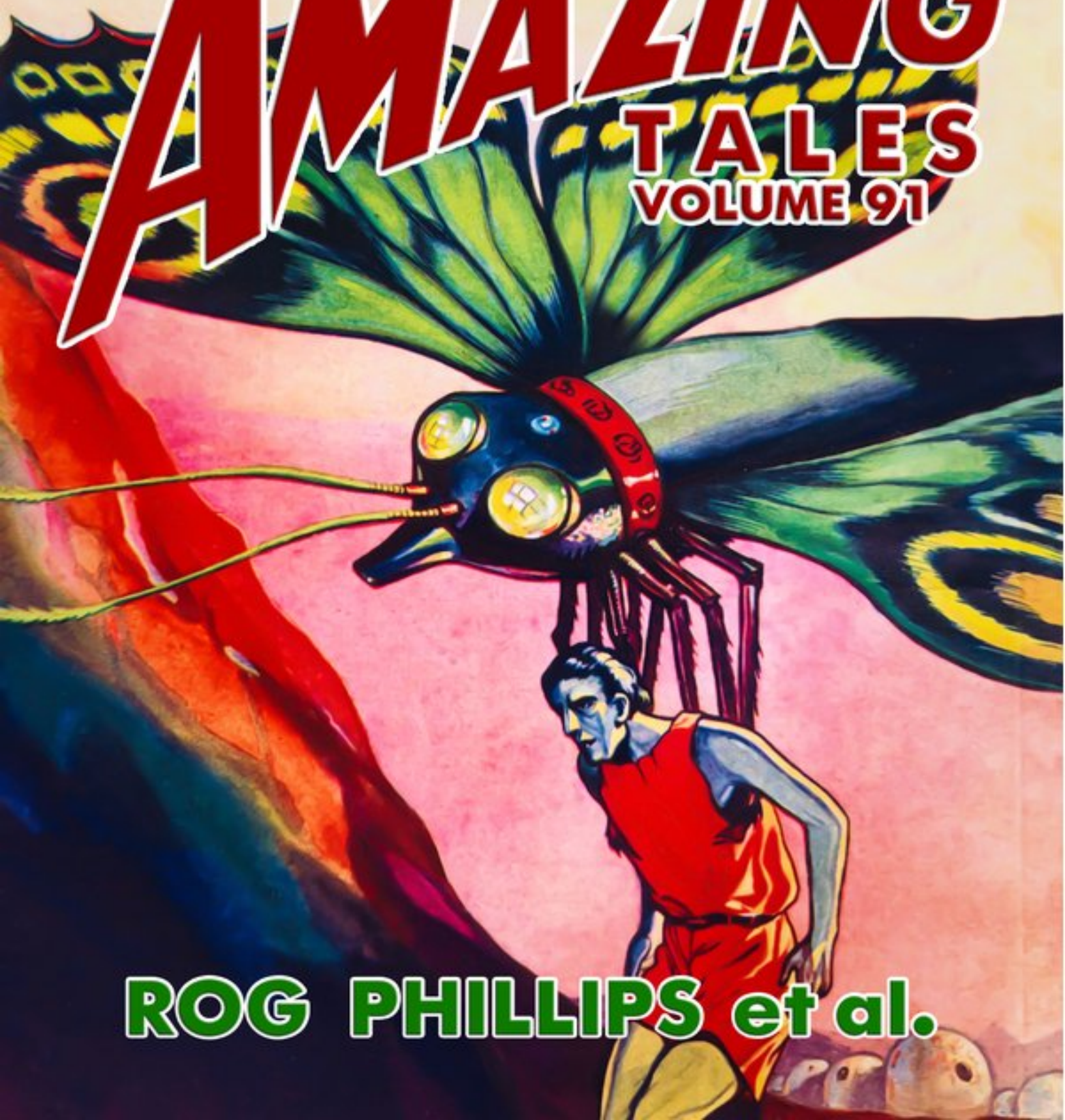


CLASSICS TO GO

AMAZING

TALES
VOLUME 91



ROG PHILLIPS et al.

Amazing Stories

Volume 91

Rog Phillips

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Repeat Performance

Rog Phillips

The pounding at the door woke me up. I groped for the light. It flooded the room, erasing the glow of the afternoon sun through the drapes. The clock said three-thirty.

"Come on, Benny! Open up!" a gruff voice ordered.

I groaned as I recognized the voice. As I went to the door I hastily reviewed last night's activities. Two wallets on the subway that had netted seventeen bucks, one in an elevator at the Morrison that had added forty-five bucks. An all night crap game near the Wilson El that had nearly cleaned me....

"Come in, Calahan," I said cheerfully to the cop. "A social visit—I hope?"

Calahan grinned mirthlessly at my little joke. I got dressed. An hour later I was shoved into line with a dozen others. We knew what to do. We walked single file onto the stage, then faced a screen. We couldn't see beyond it because it was dark there, and floodlights from the floor and the ceiling blinded us.

"That's the man!" a woman's voice said excitedly.

My stomach did a flip flop. Who did she mean? Me? I looked at the others in the line-up. Joey North was looking sick. The others just looked uneasy, like I felt. Poor Joey....

On the sidewalk outside the station I lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. I hated the whole system. They take you down in a car. You walk home. If you get out. Suddenly I was

sick of Chicago, and when I get sick of Chicago I go somewhere.

Night found me at the counter in a drugstore in Evanston. I was beginning to feel better. I had a newspaper and a cup of coffee in front of me.

I'd read everything else, so I started reading the society stuff. A lot of it was Evanston. A bosom-type matron smirked at me from one of the pictures. Under the picture it said she was Mrs. Sarah Fish, Evanston society leader. I started to read more. Then this little guy came into the drugstore.

"A package of Camels," he said to the cashier.

He sensed my stare. I looked quickly down at my paper and casually took a sip of coffee. But I wasn't interested in the news now. Out of the corner of my eye I studied the little man. He wasn't more than five feet tall, very slim, and very erect. I got the strange impression of looking at a small giant. Then I realized what caused that impression. It was his head. It was more the right size for a man six feet tall.

"That will be twenty cents," the baldish cashier said.

The little man handed him a bill he had been holding in his hand. "By the way," he said as the cashier rang up the twenty cents, "Could you tell me the way to the Sarah Fish residence?" I pricked up my ears at that.

"Why yes," the cashier said. "You go down to the stop sign and turn right two blocks. It's the big white place set back from the street, with a wide driveway that goes back to a four car garage. Let's see now. That was twenty cents. Twenty-five, fifty, one. Two, three. There you are. Don't forget, the big white house."

"Thank you," the little man said.

I watched him go to the door. It wasn't until he was out of sight that I did a double take.

"Hey!" I said to the cashier. "What kind of a bill did that little guy give you?"

"Why, a—a—Oh good Lord."

I slid out of my seat at the counter and leaned over the cigar counter as the cashier rang up a no sale. He picked out the bill and held it in limp fingers. I took it and spread it on the glass counter.

It was a three dollar bill. There was a picture of Truman on it. I turned it over. On the back was a picture of an atomic mushroom cloud with a series of ellipses interlocking to form the popular conception of an atom.

It looked like real money. It had the feel of real money.

"Well," the cashier said philosophically. "I guess I'm out three dollars. His talking was what threw me off."

I picked up the three dollar bill and squinted at the fine print. It said *Series of 1964*. The date on my newspaper on the counter beside my cold coffee was April 5, 1954.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," I said. "I'll give you three dollars for it."

"Oh no!" the cashier said quickly. "I can't do that. The law says I must turn all counterfeit money directly over to the nearest F.B.I. office."

"Sure," I soothed. "Sure, I know that. But this isn't the same thing. A counterfeit is an imitation of real money—and there aren't any real three dollar bills."

The cashier chuckled suddenly. "By gollies you're right," he said. "That means I can keep it. Think I will. I'm going to deposit it in the bank tomorrow morning. Just for a laugh. Ned Sparks'll fall off his high stool when he sees it."

"I'll give you three and a half for it," I said.

But I was already turning away as he shook his head. I knew the only way to get a three dollar bill was to catch up with the little man.

Outside the drugstore I looked up the street the way the little man had gone. He wasn't in sight. I saw the stop sign a block away, and hurried toward it.

It was Lincoln Avenue, in a part of Evanston that was just like a small town set off by itself, downstate instead of a northern suburb of Chicago. I followed the directions the cashier had given the little man. Turn right two blocks.

I still hadn't seen the little man by the time I reached the big white house with the four car garage. The house itself had one of those old colonial porches with six pillars holding up a porch roof with unnecessary solidity. Between the pillars brightly lit huge windows brought a clear view of the interior.

A party of some sort was going on. That's the way it looked. People standing in small groups holding glasses.

I hesitated. I wanted a three dollar bill, but was it worth it, to go up to the door and ask for someone I didn't know? I decided it was, and went up the walk as though I belonged there.

Beside the huge door was a button. I pushed it, and heard a series of chimes ring out. A few seconds later the massive door swung open and a middle aged man with a jovial expression said, "Come in, come in. I'm George Wile. Sarah's somewhere. What's your name? Sorry I can't keep track of all of Sarah's friends."

"Ben Smith," I said, stepping inside.

"Sarah'll show up in a minute," George Wile said, and promptly forgot me.

That was okay by me. I stood by the door looking around, trying to spot the little man. A gorgeous young thing held a tray in front of my face until I took a tall glass that contained, I discovered, an excellent Tom Collins.

I couldn't see the little man anywhere. I mosied across the room to the archway to another room where there were more people. He wasn't there either.

A distinguished appearing man seemed to be the center of attraction here. I edged into the crowd around him and finally deduced that he had earlier given a book review or lecture or something, and this was the refreshment period before everyone went home.

Still no sign of the little man.

Suddenly a sharp rapping sounded. I turned my head. A woman with a large bust was pounding a gavel on the small stand. Around me the buzz of conversation dropped off into silence.

"Is there a Mr. Ben Smith here?" she asked.

"He's here somewhere, Sarah," George Wile's voice sounded loudly. "Where are you, Ben old boy?"

I was too startled to speak for a second or two. Then I said, "Yes!"

Sarah Fish separated me from the crowd with her eyes, then came toward me. There seemed to be concern, a mixture of pity, and something else in her expression. When she reached me she said in a low voice, "Please come with me, Mr. Smith."

No one was paying attention to us. The conversational murmur was on again. I followed her into the front room and around to a door underneath the stairs that arched up to a balcony.

She opened the door and stood aside for me to go in. There was still that strange something in her expression. I tried to place it, then went past her into the room.

The little man was there, standing across the room against a back-drop of shelves filled with books. His piercing eyes flicked at me. Then he lifted his arm and examined his wristwatch.

"Right on the second," he said, a shade of disappointment in his tone. "I'd hoped this time you'd be off a few seconds." He lowered his arm and advanced toward me, hand outstretched politely. "I'm Sam Golfin," he said. "I want to ask you some questions, Benny. And this time I hope I get the right answers."

I ignored his hand. "How'd you know my name?" I demanded. "How'd you know I came here?"

"Oh dear," Sarah Fish said. "I *don't* know how to tell him, Sam. You'll have to."

Sam Golfin gave her a sympathetic glance, then looked grim. "This time," he said, fixing me with a stare, "I'm not going to try to spare your feelings. In—" He studied his watch again. "—exactly one hour and seventeen minutes you are going to be murdered. A man doesn't just get murdered without knowing who might have done it, who his enemies are. Someone in this house is going to kill you. *Who is it?*"

"You see," Sarah Fish said, her bosom expanding in an anxious breath, "you *must* tell us who did it."

I stared at them both, then gave what I intended to be a derisive laugh, but it sounded thin. "What makes you think I'm going to be murdered?" I said.

"For one thing," Sam Golfin said cautiously, "it's in tomorrow's papers."

"Oh, I see," I said sarcastically.

"I know you must think I'm joking...." Golfin said.

"Hardly," I said. And it was the truth. I thought he was crazy.

"I'm glad you don't," Sam Golfin said with relief. "Every minute counts if we are to save you."

"Save me?" I mocked. "But I thought you said it was in the papers. So it must be true."

"I'm not so sure," Golfin said with an important frown. "I'm not so sure the future can't be altered. That's why I'm here. I want to see if I can change the future. If I can...." He left whatever thought he was toying with unspoken.

A sudden thought shattered my amused point of view. That three dollar bill. It had been a *Series of 1964*, something utterly absurd by itself. But coupled with Sam Golfin's obvious conviction that I was going to be murdered, and his talk of changing the future, it made a pattern that made me suddenly uneasy.

"Why would anyone here kill me?" I asked with a defiance that covered my unease. "I don't even know anyone here. As a matter of fact, the reason I came here was to—"

"But someone here knows you," Golfin said. "And that someone knew you were going to be here. The murder was—will be—carefully planned."

"Just how am I going to be murdered?" I asked, not grinning.

"The coroner's report says that you were—will be—poisoned," Golfin said.

I thought of the Tom Collins, and my stomach turned over.

"A venom," Golfin went on, "injected by means of a pin or needle. The coroner found—will find, that is—a small

puncture in the small of your back on the right side, with some of the venom still imbedded, along with the paste."

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," I said. "I'm getting out of here." I turned toward the door.

"Wait!" Sarah Fish said. "Mr. Golfin says it will happen when you try to leave."

My momentum left me as my hand touched the doorknob. It flowed out of me. I turned around and faced them.

"Just how do you know all this?" I said, glaring at the little man.

"I suppose I had better tell you," he said. "I'm *Dr. Golfin*."

"Oh," I said.

He reached into his breast pocket and extracted an expensive leather billfold. Looking quite important for his size, he took out a card and extended it to me.

"My specialty is—has been," he said, "amnesiacs. I've made a life study of them."

I looked at the card. It gave the name, Dr. S. L. Golfin, and an address on Wabash, Chicago.

"The phenomenon of amnesia interested me," he went on. "A person suddenly can't remember anything. Perhaps years later memory returns, but there is a gap. Why?"

He smiled at me triumphantly. Sarah Fish nodded sagely.

"Because...." Golfin lifted his left arm with a flourish and inspected his watch. "One hour and three minutes," he said quietly. Then, "That was the question I asked myself. Why? Unfortunately amnesia is rather rare. The few genuine cases didn't give me enough opportunity to find the answer. I did, however, arrive at several theories about it. And finally I came to the conclusion that amnesia is part of a larger field.

I expanded my research to include other phenomena such as prophetic dreams. I was sure I was on the right track, but unfortunately it was impossible to study a person in the process of having a prophetic dream."

"I can see that," I said sympathetically.

"Exactly," Golfin said, blinking up at me. "However, I asked myself, 'Of the several theories, wouldn't the one that also accounts for prophetic dreams be the more probable one?' And of course it's well known that the more a theory explains, the more probable it is of being true."

"Not always," I ventured.

He pondered this, then looked at his watch again. "Fifty-three minutes," he said.

I swallowed.

"But how do amnesia and prophetic dreams tie together?" I asked.

"They are basically the same phenomenon," Golfin said, "with one important difference. In amnesia the conscious mind jumps over a period of time and stays there, going on in normal fashion. In prophetic dreams it does the same, *except that it returns to its starting point.*"

I glanced at Sarah Fish. She was listening intently. It occurred to me that she hadn't heard any of this before either. She was the congenial type. Undoubtedly when Golfin had sprung this murder business on her she hadn't asked questions.

"Now do you see what I'm getting at?" Golfin said. "The mechanism must be the same in both instances. An underlying mechanism. In amnesia a person may suffer a brain injury, or a person may be under a terrific compulsion to escape the present. In either case the person jumps over a period of days or years in, seemingly, an instant—and

refuses to return. In prophetic dreams the person jumps into the future to an instant when something crucial is taking place, and returns to the present with memory of it."

I looked at my own watch and said, "Any other time I would like to listen, but what are you driving at?"

He frowned and glanced at his watch. "Forty-one minutes," he said. "This is what I'm driving at. If I could discover the mechanism by which the mind leaps into the future, and returns, I would have a means of doing that myself. I could, possibly, go to tomorrow and buy a newspaper and see what it says, and return to today with that knowledge."

"I see now!" Sarah Fish said, quivering with excitement. "That's how you learned that Mr. Smith is to be murdered!"

"So you did discover a way?" I said.

"I did. That's why I'm here. For some time now I have been going into the future at will, and also into the past. I've learned how to control it, the length of time I stay there, and just how far into the future or the past I go."

"It sounds good," I admitted. "How could you change things?"

He glanced at his watch worriedly. "We haven't much time," he said. "A little over half an hour. What I want to do is this. I have the instruments with me to send you into the future to the moment you are dying. I want you to go there and see if you don't know then who killed you, and how. You will return to the present moment with that knowledge, and be able to avoid death. At least—" He smiled encouragingly. "At least I hope you will."

"And if I don't?"

He shrugged. "This is my first serious attempt to change the past. Sooner or later I will succeed." He had reached into his

breast pocket again. Now he brought out something like a fat fountain pen.

"I don't know," I said uneasily. "You sure this doesn't hurt?"

He unscrewed the end of the thing. There was a short hollow needle on it, with what looked like a trigger that had swung out into position against the side.

"I've used it on myself many times," he said. He started toward me.

"Wait a minute," I said, backing up a step and holding up my hand. "This is going to take me up to the instant I'm dying?"

"That's right," he said, "and I want you to try, in that single instant you are there, to find out who did it. Think where you were when it happened, and who might have done it."

"You sure it won't kill me?" I asked.

He took another step toward me. "Of course not," he said.

"Wait a minute," I said, backing up against a bookcase to get away from him. "Why didn't you go farther ahead in time and read in the papers who did it? Wouldn't that have been the best way?"

For a brief instant his eyes flashed with what seemed to me to be madness. I thought of the three dollar bill. The guy was crazy. It had to be that. He'd been using the stuff on himself. Whatever it was it had affected his mind. He imagined he could send his mind into the future. Or maybe

—

I remembered suddenly why I was here. I had followed Golfin in the hopes of getting one of those three dollar bills. That made it a vicious circle. Sure. It was *he* who was going to murder me, if anyone was. Those other people didn't know me. And he said I was going to be poisoned by venom

on a pin or needle—or *was it going to be a hypodermic needle?*

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Smith," Golfin purred. "It's the only hope of saving your life. Your murder was never solved."

"Oh, it is, is it?" I gritted. I snaked out with my hand and wrapped my fingers around the wrist of the hand that held the needle. "Give me that thing," I said.

He struggled. He had a lot of strength for a little man. He pivoted around and tried to pull his wrist free. With his other hand he tried to get hold of the needle. I kept shaking his wrist to keep him from doing it.

Then I remembered his expensive billfold. It probably had the three dollar bills in it. I simply reached into his breast pocket and appropriated it. He didn't know it was gone.

A second later, with a loud grunt, he twisted violently in a last effort to get free. I heard a sharp snap, and at the same time I felt a sharp pain stab into me.

It was in the small of my back on the right side. *The small of my back on the right side!*

I let go of his wrist. He was just starting to jerk again, and my letting go made him stagger backwards and fall against the bookcase on the far wall. He didn't even know his gadget had gone off!

I did, though. And a strange fatalism was seeping into me, like the emotional effect of a drug. A numbness was beginning to make itself felt along my right side.

Sarah Fish was staring at me, her eyes large and round. Not like a fish though. Too human, too full of concern and sympathy. Maybe she had seen the needle stick me....

Funny ... Golfin came here convinced in his own insane way that he was going to prevent a murder. If he hadn't come, I

wouldn't have come either. And if he hadn't come, there wouldn't have been a corpse....

I looked around until I found the door, and headed toward it. My right leg dragged a little as I walked. And I didn't need to go into the future to know what was going to happen. I would make it to the door. Sure. I would open it, and walk through the crowd outside toward the front door. Before I got there I would die. Golfin would never know, maybe, that it was his drug that had killed me. Sarah Fish, convinced by the way it happened that Golfin had been right, would insist to the police that I was okay when I left her.

I could stop right where I was and die in this room. My hand gripped the doorknob and twisted, and the door opened. And I knew I wasn't going to stay in this room. I was going to try to get to the front door.

My whole right side was numb now. I had to walk slowly. Even then I wasn't sure of my next step. And with each step the massive front door seemed farther away.

I wasn't going to make it.

I bumped into someone—or someone bumped into me. I jerked my head around with a snarl starting on my lips. It was George Wile.

"Sorry old boy," he apologized. "I didn't see you."

I blinked at him, an idea forming. Maybe if I could change something—any little thing—I could save myself. What could I change? I didn't know, because I didn't know whether even the change I might make would be part of the future. Still....

"Sall right, ol' boy," I said, bumping against him. And my hands moved fast. My own wallet went into his pocket, and his went into mine.

I stepped back, grinning. I had at least done something to confuse the issues. I would leave that puzzle behind me. It

wouldn't fool anyone though, because they would know who I was. Sarah Fish and Sam Golfin.

My heart was starting to pound painfully. Panic flooded into me. I had to reach that front door. I had to! It was already open, and people were going through it, leaving the party. The distinguished appearing man was standing there shaking hands with them as they left.

Where was I supposed to drop dead? I wished I had asked Golfin that. I took another step, and another. And, unbelieving, I was at the door.

"Glad you could be here," the distinguished appearing man said, gripping my hand and letting it go.

He had turned to the next person, and I was standing there, my heart pounding, expecting to drop. Somebody pushed against me gently and said, "Pardon me." I put my hand on the door frame and put one foot over the threshold. I was still standing.

I let go the door frame and put the other foot over the threshold. I was standing on the porch. I sucked in a breath. It was too good to be true. There was a catch to it somewhere. But—

I took another step. Eager haste possessed me. I took quick steps off the porch. I was on the sidewalk. I was still alive!

And somewhere I had lost the numbness in my side.

Around me people were getting in their cars, the doors slamming shut softly. I glanced over my shoulder. More people were coming out of the house.

I waited for no more. Almost running, I went the two blocks to the stop sign and turned toward the drugstore.

"Made it," I said under my voice as I pushed open the door and went in. I slid into the same seat I had occupied before.

The same counter girl took my order for coffee. "Black this time," I said. "And where's my paper?"

My heart wasn't pounding any more. I was still shaky, but there wasn't a chance of my dying. Not a chance. I grinned to myself.

My coffee came. Also a paper. I sipped the coffee and tried to get interested in the paper. But I kept going back to what had happened.

Then I heard the sound of police sirens. They approached until they were just outside. I looked out and saw the police cars turn the corner, going in the direction of the house where I had been.

So someone had died after all!

I reached under my coat and touched the spot where the needle had struck me. It was a little sore, but not enough to bother me.

Who had been killed? George Wile? Suddenly I remembered the exchange of wallets I had made. I reached into my hip pocket and took out his wallet.

I looked in the money compartment and saw I had enriched myself by twenty dollars. Grinning, I looked in another pocket of the wallet. There was a package of needles. My grin wiped off. They were ordinary sewing needles. But the pointed ends were covered with what seemed to be gray paint.

The counter girl was at the far end scrubbing the counter. The baldish cashier was on the other side of the store behind a counter, waiting on a man and a woman. I took Golfin's billfold and quickly thumbed through it.

There were several of the three dollar bills. There were two ones. And there were five twenty dollar bills. I shoved all the money into my pocket except one of the three dollar bills.

I made sure no one was looking my way, and dropped Golfin's billfold on the floor, kicking it under the counter behind me in the center aisle where it wouldn't be found unless the janitor swept under there. I decided to do the same with Wile's. After all, if Sam Golfin were right, and there was a murder, I didn't want a couple of strange wallets on me. Nor those coated needles.

I looked at the three dollar bill in my hand. It was like that other one. Picture of Truman on it, atomic mushroom on the other side, with the atom superimposed. I squinted at the fine print. *Series of 1958.*

That made me frown. Why would someone bother to change the date on phony money? And it was too nice a job of engraving for such a thing too.

I thought of one of the tests for good money. I rubbed the three dollar bill against the margin of the newspaper. Some of the ink came off.

The wild theory Golfin had fed me was tame compared to what I was beginning to suspect. I took out the rest of his money and picked out a twenty dollar bill. Putting the rest back in my pocket, I studied the twenty. I rubbed it against the margin of the newspaper. Ink came off. It was genuine money.

Taking a deep breath, I squinted at the fine print. *Series of 1964.*

I looked at the rest of the money I had taken from Golfin. The two ones were okay. All the rest had dates in the future. I knew money. I could spot a phony bill a block away. It was real money.

Either a master counterfeiter had—Another thought struck me. I compared the serial numbers of the bills. All different. That clinched it. They weren't phony.

That meant that Golfin was *actually from the future himself*. Then why had he given me and Sarah Fish that story about prophetic dreams and amnesia? I thought about that a bit and nodded to myself. He wanted to give us something we could believe. We wouldn't have believed a raw statement that he was from the future. Those three dollar bills....

The more I thought about them the less they seemed like a gag. I tried to recall every detail of Golfin's passing it when he bought his cigarettes. He hadn't done it like he was pulling a gag. He had taken his change and walked out. He didn't know he had done anything wrong. He had assumed a three dollar bill was used here—or now, rather.

My coffee was cold. The girl was looking at me as if she wanted to close up. I smiled at her and tossed a quarter on the counter and went out on the sidewalk.

I debated what to do. Should I forget the whole thing? Or should I take a walk back to Sarah Fish's house and see what was going on? I decided on the latter.

Her house was dark. No police cars were there. That was not what I had expected. With a murder, there should be police cars, and the place should be lit up. Or maybe not. It had been an hour since I left the place.

I went back to the drugstore and caught the bus down to the Davis Street El station. Riding on the elevated it occurred to me that maybe I'd better not go to my apartment. If the police had gotten my wallet from George Wile they might be waiting for me.

I decided to rent a room for the night and wait until morning. Then I changed my mind. If I went back to my room I could claim Wile had picked *my* pocket. If the police were looking for me they would eventually get me anyway, since I already had a record of three arrests for this and that.

I sighed and relaxed, and after a while the train dipped down into the subway, and I got off and had a late snack at the corner cafeteria.

It was almost midnight when I climbed the stairs to my apartment. When I opened the door the phone was ringing. I turned on the light and closed the door, and answered it.

"Ben Smith?" a strange voice said. "This is George Wile."

"Oh," I said. I did some quick thinking. "Oh!" I said in a different tone. "I remember you. How'd you know my number. Did you find my wallet? That must be it. I lost it. Thanks a lot for calling me about it. I'll meet you tomorrow and get it back."

"It was in my pocket," he said coldly. "And my own was missing. I want it back."

"Yours was missing?" I said. "Hey, wait a minute. If you think I got it you're crazy. Somebody played a trick on us. There must have been a pickpocket at Sarah Fish's tonight."

"There was," he said coldly. "You. I took the trouble of calling the police and found out. I want my wallet and I want it tonight."

"I don't have it. No kidding." I said worriedly. "I'm handing you the straight goods. By the way, what happened after I left? I heard the police sirens."

"Someone had called them and said there was a murder. They were pretty sore about it."

"And there wasn't? Ha Ha?" I said.

"Quit stalling, Smith," Wile said. "I want my wallet back. And everything in it."

"Haven't got it," I said.

A long sigh came over the phone.

"All right," Wile said. "I sort of expected this. I'll give you five hundred dollars for it."

I took the phone from my face and stared at it, thinking. Talking sounds came from the receiver. I put it back to my ear and said, "Come again? I didn't hear you."

"You heard me all right," Wile said. "Okay, I can get you two thousand dollars from the bank tomorrow. Meet me at eleven o'clock at State and Washington, northeast corner."

"Okay," I said. "Be sure and bring me *my* wallet."

"I will," he said smoothly. His tone became worried. "Is my wallet in a *safe* place?"

"Sure," I said, thinking of the spot under the counter where I had slid it with my foot. "You don't need to worry about it at all."

The line was dead. I realized suddenly that he had trapped me into an admission that I had his wallet.

This wasn't the same as a little light finger work on a crowded train, or getting a rubber check chased, or any of the many things I did when the opportunity arose, to pay my rent. Wile didn't just want these poison needles back. He was planning to kill me to keep me quiet. But he wanted the needles and his wallet back too. First.

I thought of Golfin and his reading in the papers that I had been murdered, and it wasn't funny. I locked the door and wedged a chair under the knob. Wile now knew for sure I was the one who had his wallet. He could be on his way down to kill me right now.

I started packing.

It wasn't until I was almost packed that I suddenly became aware of someone standing behind me. I jerked around in alarm. It was Sam Golfin.