

Mummy powder won't do, because mummies are only a few thousand years old; take a bit of coal, distill it properly, and the problem of your pale, thin wife will . . . But we progress too rapidly. See below for the details.

MR. MEDLEY'S TIME PILL

by Stephen Barr

MR. MEDLEY AND HIS FAMILY lived over and behind his shop, in the small town of Freem in Kent, England. On the shop window was lettered in gold, "Geo. Medley, Chemist." The remarkable part of it is that Mr. Medley was a chemist—amateur, ill-schooled, perhaps, but in his spare time more than a mere compounder and purveyor of remedies. He was a member of the noble company of experimental minds that includes Paracelsus, Boyle and Lavoisier. Spare time, though, was in short supply, either in, over or behind the chemist's shop.

On a certain morning in 1937, in late July, Mr. Medley sat at breakfast with his family. Taking them clockwise, and starting with Mr. Medley, they are: his daughter, Phyllis, fifteen, pink, overweight, dissatisfied—his wife, Lizzy, thirty-six, pale, thin, dissatis-

fied—her sister, Bertha, age unknown, and Bertha's husband, Walter, ditto, both dissatisfied—and finally the son, Tommy, ten, (too horrible to be described). The general dissatisfaction in this group—if one can aim an emotion—was aimed at Mr. Medley, who, they felt, failed them as a provider. He did not succeed sufficiently as a shopkeeper, he did not have enough customers and nor did he charge them high enough prices. They considered that he did not work long enough hours, or show enough gumption. Brother-in-law Walter in particular felt this. Walter was all gumption, though so far it had not got him a job, but he had expectations. The daughter, Phyllis, felt in addition that her father did not understand her. She was right—George Medley's family were one and all enigmas to him, and he disliked them with

absolute impartiality. Not actively, for his mind was on other matters—they were merely an unpleasant background to his thoughts.

"Have another nice bite of kipper, do," said Lizzy to her sister Bertha.

"Well, I won't say no," replied Bertha. "Ta."

"'N I have another bun, Ma?" This from Tommy.

"You've had four and that's sufficient."

Walter wagged his head sagaciously. "You know, George my boy, what you ought to do is put in a marble-top counter in the shop, and sell ices. Like they do in the big chemist's at Sydmouth. Tract customers."

Mr. Medley looked at him vaguely for a moment. "Oh; you mean a soda fountain. Where am I going to get the spare cash for it? Money doesn't grow on trees, you know."

"Not around here it doesn't!" Lizzy said, with a thin sniff. "And you put that down directly!" she added to Tommy who had filched a bun. He obeyed her by cramming it into his mouth and putting it down that way. For an instant his neck swelled and his eyes bulged, empurpled—then everything subsided.

"Well I never!" commented Aunt Bertha. "The very idea!"

Phyllis stood up. "Have to go out," she announced.

"But you didn't hardly eatny breakfast!" her mother complained. "Just one egg and a cuppa, and no bacon!"

"I don't wantny bacon," said Phyllis. "Sfattening." She opened a compact and made a vivid cupid's bow on her small suspicious mouth. Her father remembered that when it came to sweets she ignored callories.

"And you're too young for make-up!" said Lizzy. "Speak to her, George!"

"Wipe it off like a good girl, Phyl," George Medley said, but his daughter snorted and flounced out. The small house trembled with her passing.

After another cup of tea—he would have preferred coffee but Lizzy was for tea—George went to the front and opened the shop for the day. Mr. Bolter, the postman, stuck his head in at the door shortly afterwards and handed George a couple of letters.

"Gointerbeyot!" he said, and left.

George glanced at the wall thermometer and agreed—it already said 78, and this is hot indeed for an English summer morning. By nine o'clock it had clouded over and looked as if it might rain, but instead, George had a visitor. Not a customer—they were rare in the morning—but his crony, Herbert Willet, veterinarian.

"Well well, George! How's the boy?" Herbert said. His tone of

voice suggested surprise at finding George in his own shop. "How's the experiment coming?"

"Sh!" George said, and looked at the bead portiere behind him that led to the living quarters. "Not so bloody loud, Herbert!" He beckoned him over to his dispensing cubicle. "It's like this," he said softly. "This afternoon's Thursday, and I'm going to try it!"

"Good for you!" Herbert replied. "But what's Thursday got to do with it?"

"Have to close up early Thursday afternoons, Herbert. It's the law. Lizzy's going for an outing with the others and I'm supposed to stay here and do the books. Stead of which . . ." He closed one eye, and Herbert nodded conspiratorially.

"Hope you know what you're up to," he said.

"I'm only using one tenth of a minnim," George reassured him. "And that's been diluted one to a hundred beforehand, see?"

"Well, when we tried it on that mouse, he just disappeared—pop. He's not come back, either."

"Aaah!" Mr. Medley took a lecturer's stance. "That's because a cat must have got him in the future, see? Now, if that hadn't happened he'd be back as soon as the drug wore off—which to you and me here in the present would have been *no* time."

"Then how'd we've known he'd gone, eh?"

"Easy," replied George. "He'd have bound to've moved, and he'd turn up on the other side of the room or somewhere. Maybe outside."

Herbert Willet looked very solemn. "That being the case," he said, "since the Earth's moved several thousand miles during the interim, he probably may not have been ate by a cat, and he's probably floating around in the middle of space!"

"Certainly not, Herbert," George said firmly. "When he comes back he comes back to the way things were when he left, and the Earth'd be right where it is now!"

"Then he'd be in the same place, too, and you couldn't possibly tell he'd been gone." Herbert was calmly triumphant.

"No, Herb," George said with suave patience. "No. We haven't been on the trip into the future, and he has!"

Herbert Willet shook his head. "Sbeyond me," he said, and left for his place of business.

After jejune morning and a tedious luncheon, the Medley family minus George went for their afternoon outing. The skies were halfheartedly clearing in patches, and as the charabanc pulled away, Herbert Willet crossed the street from the Elite Tea Shoppe where he had lunched, and entered the chemist's shop. In the back was a small scrubby and neglected gar-

den at the end of which stood a hut with one window. George unlocked the padlock and the two men went in and closed the door. Here, and only here, George Medley was master of all he surveyed. It was his private, unofficial and secret lab. Lizzy was of the slatternly impression that it was used for storage.

"You know," Herbert said, as they sat on boxes by an improvised work bench, "you never did tell me how you got the Mummy Powder. Come on, George: tell us!"

"Aaah!" George smiled cabalistically.

"You must have robbed the British Museum," Herbert said.

"I only said it was mummy powder," George confided. "As a matter of fact mummies are only a few thousand years old, and you need a far, far older bit of life substance than that, I can tell you!"

"What is it, then? Mammoth? Dinosaur? Then you must've robbed the Natural History Museum, George."

George shook his head, and began to compound and form a pill. "Coal, Herbert: coal. It's the oldest organic stuff you can get, and coal's what I use. Leastways the stuff I'm after's in it, and I got it out by trituration, leaching and distillation. *There* we are." He picked up the pill. "Want me to make one for you so's you can come along, too?"

"No fear!"

"Well, reach behind you, Herb, and fetch that bottle of port out of that box—we'll drink to my trip, and I can use it to swallow the pill at the same time."

Herbert did as requested, and George poured two mugsfull.

"Jolly good health," he said, popped the pill into his mouth and drank the port. As he lowered the mug he looked out of the window at the tall weeds—which gave a slight twitch. At the same moment the sky became suddenly lighter, which was evidently due to a largish cloud disappearing as if it had never been there. George turned to remark on this astonishing fact to Herbert, but he seemed to have taken himself off. This was odd because George was almost facing the door and he hadn't seen him go. Perhaps he had dozed off for a moment—but it was unlikely as the mug was still in his hand. Then, looking out of the window again, he saw his wife, Lizzy, appear discontentedly at an upstairs window. She *couldn't* be there, he thought—and then realized the explanation.

But . . . but . . . things ought to be more different! He ought to be ages in the future—he didn't know how many years, but ages, anyway. Everything looked exactly the same: the house needed a bit of paint, but not any more than when he started on his timetrip. And there was the roller-skate Tommy had left lying on the

path right where you'd trip over it.

He got up, replaced the port out of sight, relocked the padlock and went over to the house. Lizzy's narrow face had been withdrawn, and as he went in he could hear her moving about upstairs and humming. In the middle of the dining table was the folded copy of the *Sydmouth Advertiser* that came every midday, and George bent over to read the date: July 30, 1937. He had taken the pill on July 29, 1937—not much of a trip, it wasn't. Just one bloody day!

He glanced at the cuckoo clock, from which Tommy had long since torn the cuckoo: 2:15—yes; one exact day. Have to try again and use a bit more of the stuff, he thought, and sat down heavily.

"Who's there?" (Lizzy's voice, alarmed, and yet with an aggrieved whine) "Who is it?" A moment's silence, followed by footsteps and she appeared at the head of the stairs. "Why, however did you get back so quick, George?"

"Ran," he said, and pushed through the bead portiere to the shop. He saw that the front door was bolted, and decided to leave it that way. When he had to go out on an errand he always locked up as Lizzy maintained it wasn't her place to wait on customers. If he was so close-fisted that he wouldn't employ an errand boy, why that was *his* look-out. She had enough to do cleaning up and

cooking and making beds and I don't know what all. Since everyone made his own bed, the cooking was of the slapdash-I-can't-be-bothered variety and the house dirty, it was hard to imagine what occupied Lizzy's time. Her voice came again.

"But you said you had to go up to the Hall with a bottle of medicine for Sir Humfrey, and it's a twenty-minute walk!" She was now downstairs in the back parlor, and came into the shop. "You *couldn't* have got there and back, so don't try and pretend you did!"

"I ran into . . . into Bolter. He was making a special delivery at the Hall and he took it for me." He pushed past her. "Excuse me," he said, and went into the back parlor again and took up the *Sydmouth Advertiser*—an idea had come to him. There was nothing new about it, but just the same it was a wonderful idea. Tomorrow's big horse race—or rather, today's—was Goodwood, and he couldn't lose! It was simply glorious, and he started for the garden and the privacy of his shed.

"And where are you going, may one enquire?" Lizzy said. "There comes a customer and the door's locked! I think he's got a prescription, so you come right back!"

"Open the door and tell him to leave it," George said, feeling light-headed.

"Well I never!" Lizzy said, and he heard her go into the shop as he

walked out. Inside the shed he opened the paper to the sporting news and noted the winner—an outsider called Subterfuge, at twenty-to-one. Easy name to remember. He took out the port and had an experimental swig, and then put it back. No point in getting tiddly—he didn't want to miss anything. Funny thing, this—being twenty-four hours ahead of himself. He rubbed his face and realized he didn't need a shave. Of course not: he was only twenty minutes older than when he took the pill yesterday.

Beyond making a nice bit of change on Subterfuge he could think of nothing either interesting or advantageous that could be done. He looked at the newspaper again: "Japanese Bomb Tientsin." Well, that wasn't news—he'd heard it over the wireless yesterday. Still, what could you expect? It was a rare tomorrow that held any total surprises. Coming events cast their shadows before them, except in the case of a horse race, or maybe the Stock Exchange. George thought about that for a moment, and dismissed it. Stocks didn't go up enough in one day to make it worth your while, and besides he wasn't in London and he didn't have the capital. He had six hundred pounds in the bank, and when the pill wore off and he got back he'd take the train to Sydmouth and give it all to Johnny Glow to put on Subterfuge.

He got up and sauntered back to the house. From the shop he heard Lizzy's voice again, shrill with astonishment, shouting at somebody. "How'd you get around to the front? I just saw you go in to the garden!"

"Climbed over the wall," a man's voice replied. The voice was strange to George, and yet it reminded him of someone.

"You gave me ever such a start!" Lizzy went on. "George Medley, you must've been drinking! Running about in the streets and climbing over walls!"

Understanding came to George, and he slipped out of sight as he heard Lizzy coming. He waited until she climbed the stairs and banged her bedroom door before he went quietly in and through to the shop. Standing by the dispensary counter was himself, or rather, his alter ego—George Number Two—tomorrow's Mr. Medley. He had a smug look.

"Hello, Georgie!" he said. George One realized that "Georgie" was what he would call himself—it was the affectionate designation of his childhood, and alien to his critical and disapproving wife.

There was a short silence. George (One) was accustomed to seeing himself in a mirror, but not to having the reflection exhibit a life of its own, and look at him, as opposed to look back at him. And talking. That was the rummest part—embarrassing too.

"Makes you feel funny like, doesn't it?" remarked George Two. "Remember it from yesterday, or rather, from today—first time around. As you, that is."

George One looked at him uncomprehendingly. He felt more than light-headed—he felt like a clock whose alarm had gone off ahead of time.

"Well," George Two went on cheerfully, "now you've arrived I'll pop off to Perly Junction and collect our winnings from Johnny Glow. Six hundred quid at twenty-to-one . . ." He cogitated.

"But . . . I haven't placed the bet yet!" George One said.

"Course you did. Yesterday afternoon," George Two reassured him. "Right after you got back you slipped out and caught the two-forty. I went to the bank first, of course—or *you* did, if you prefer. 'T's the same thing, except I remember and you don't yet. You won't until the second time around—when you'll be *me*. Twig?"

George One nodded uncertainly. It was all deuced rum. "But is Johnny going to be able to pay off? That's a lot of money—twelve thou—*that's* what it comes to. And why Perly Junction? Johnny's place is in Sydmouth."

"Don't worry about that now," George Two said, mysteriously. "I'll explain when I get back. So, while I'm gone you look after the shop, and . . . *her*." He looked up at the ceiling significantly.

"Where's all the others?" George One asked after a moment.

"That's right, you don't remember yet, do you? Well, Tommy's off with his nasty chum, Snapper Smith. Phyl's with her awful young man who's almost as old as us, and Walter and Bertha went for a walk by the river. That's all Walter ever does, isn't it? Goes for walks—for his constitution. Never get a job *that* way."

"Right," George One said. "Getting fed up with him, I am."

"You and I'll see about that," George Two reassured him. "Or rather, we—or, you,—*will* have, if you know what I mean to say." George One shook his head. "Well, it's hard to get the tenses right," George Two said.

The bedroom door could be heard to open and Lizzy's steps descending the staircase. "I'm off," said George Two. "Let me warn you of one thing—when Walter gets back and you order him out of the house—oh, yes you will," he added, as George One's eyebrows went up. "You're in for a bit of a scene, chum." Lizzy's steps could now be heard in the kitchen, and George Two drew George One through the door onto the street to be out of sight in case she came into the shop. "Now, we know Walter—always boasting about how he's been promised a job. Well, go to the phone, *now*, and call up Tanner's and see if it's true. You'll find out why later."

"All right," George One said, doubtfully. "But I still don't see why you're going to Perly Junction instead of Sydmouth."

"Aaah!" George Two winked. "It's on the main line to London and that's where I'll catch the train Johnny's going to be on!"

"Georgel!" (Lizzy's voice from the shop.)

"Go on in!" George Two said. "I'll explain it all later." He turned away, and George One went in, feeling confused.

"Who were you talking to?" Lizzy asked. "I looked through the window and you were facing this way and then I thought you turned away and the other man came in . . . except it's you, all the time! Have you been drinking again?" She looked at him with wary suspicion.

"Certainly," George said recklessly. "And now if you please I'll use the phone." Leaving her open-mouthed he went to the back hallway and called up the firm of Tanner & Son, Drapers. He spoke to his acquaintance, Geof Thompkin, and asked if Walter was being, or was likely to be, considered for a position.

"First off," replied Thompkin, "old Mr. Tanner's in Brighton and no one gets taken on without he says so. In the second place we don't need nobody and in the third, if we did we certainly wouldn't take your brother-in-law Walter and that's flat."

George hung up thoughtfully. In the shop the door opened with a loud jangle and he heard his daughter's voice. "Hello, Ma!" she said with unnecessary emphasis. He pushed through the portiere, and Phyllis caught sight of him and screamed deafeningly. "I just passed you at the *bridge!*" she said, her eyes popping. "Snot *possible!*"

"Then it couldn't have been me," he replied reasonably.

"But you *spoke* to me! And you said to tell Ma to *keep* her shirt on!"

"Well I never!" Lizzy said. "That's a fine thing to tell your own—" She was interrupted by the entrance of her sister, Bertha, followed by Brother-in-law Walter. Walter was flushed from his walk and, possibly, by a stop-off at the Red Lion Arms. He hiccupped genially—the combination of lager and exercise is gasogenic. "Well-well-k, George my boy!" he said.

George barely noticed him. It had just come to him what twelve thousand pounds might mean, and he was suddenly confident that he was going to get it. Otherwise why had George Two seemed so gay? Obviously because he, George One, was later that day going to be told by George Two that success had crowned their bet, and then he would return to yesterday to continue as George Two, who would remember this—and be gay! Complicated, but clear when analyzed calmly.

"And may one enquire," enquired Lizzy, "what you happen to be looking like the cat that ate the canary for?"

"Just ate a canary," he answered. "That's what."

His family gazed at him in consternation, and he addressed himself to Walter. "As for you," he said, "you can pack up and leave, I've had enough."

"Enough of *what*?" said Walter indignantly. The others stood in open-mouthed, temporary silence.

"Enough of you, so get cracking. I'm tired of giving you free board and lodging, and listening to you talk about your prospects. If you and your bags aren't out of here by dinner time my brother'll help me put you out. He'll be here in an hour." This seemed a good way of introducing George Two.

"You're drunk! Just like I said!" Lizzy asserted. "You haven't got my brother!"

Walter mustered his gumption and stepped forward. "What's more, I have got a job! Or, good as. With Tanner's—"

George Medley held up his hand. "It just so happens I called my pal Geot there, and I asked him about you . . . So there's no point in your lying about it. Bertha's Lizzy's sister, so she can stay—but I expect she'll want to go with you, God alone knows why. So, hop it!"

"But what ever made you call up Tanner's?" Walter said,

stunned at such prescience. "I never told you I was going to . . . to . . ." Words eluded him.

"And you," George went on to his daughter—he ignored Walter, "go up to the bathroom and wash that rouge off your face!"

"Shan't!" Phyllis announced, and glared. "Besides, tish't rouge! Slipstick!" She breathed heavily.

"All right then, I'll do it—with yellow soap!" George said, and advanced on her. She squealed—formidably.

She was fat, but he was a man, and washed she was. Her mother witnessed the unfair act, but she was powerless, though vociferous. Walter tiptoed upstairs—all gas and gumption gone from him—and was shortly joined by his wife. They packed hurriedly.

"Don't like the look in his eye!" Walter explained. "I'm not afraid of him, understand, but I think he's gone crackers!"

Downstairs Tommy and his young friend Snapper Smith had arrived. Intractable when apart, together they formed a syndicate of mischief. Snapper was perhaps the worse—the new-style, or Progressive-Education, child had not yet appeared on the scene, but Snapper and Tommy made prophetic samples.

"Snapper!" Mr. Medley's voice held a new tone, and the boy jumped. "Out!" Mr. Medley's thumb jerked towards the door.

Snapper essayed an uncertain

sneer, and George raised a threatening arm. *Out!*

"You touch me nile tell my Par!" Snapper whimpered. The elder Smith held a mortgage on George's little property, and this implication was in the air. But with twelve thousand quid coming who cared?

"You can go home and tell your father to . . . to blow his nose!" George said, and turned on his son. "And you keep away from Snapper, understand me? You're bad enough without him getting you into more trouble!" Tommy fell back behind his mother, and made the strategic error of imagining he could safely put out his tongue from this prepared position. Presently there were shrieks and tears and promises, whilst Lizzy, fruitlessly, attempted to intercede. Snapper slunk out, appalled. Tommy, damp and snuffling, repaired to his garret bedroom—Phyllis in like condition was already in hers, and in the kitchen their parents faced one another alone.

"George Medley!" cried Lizzy, "I'm going home to Mother!"

"I'm sure I don't know where you'll get the fare," George said. "She lives in North Wales, and that's a bit of a walk." He looked at the clock—almost time t'other George was back . . . with the twelve thou'. "Anyway, you always said you couldn't abide each other, so I suggest you go to the butcher's and get something de-

cent for a change—my brother'll be here and he won't want your usual out-of-a-tin supper. And—" he said, as she eyed his purse, which he put back, "you can charge it."

She narrowed her eyes in frustration. "You've no brother and well I know it! And now that you've thrown my poor sister and her husband out into the street, there'll be plenty for whoever's coming! And it isn't out of a tin—it's boiled cod left-over, so there!" George remembered the threatened cod from Wednesday, and winced. When she did cook, Lizzy believed in cooking enough for several meals at one fell clip.

"He doesn't like cod, Lizzy, so do as I ask. It's only across the street, and you can get some prime Southdown mutton chops—they're easy to do . . ." His voice trailed off as he heard the shop door open, and a now-familiar voice call out, "Got it, Georgie!" He looked at Lizzy, whose eyes opened wide. Then George Two came through and into the kitchen, to stand beside his double.

"My God!" Lizzy said hoarsely, as she looked from one to the other. "Now I *know* you're drunk!" She was about to say more, when Walter, preceded by Bertha, and carrying a small trunk, came down the stairs.

"Well, Medley," he said, with sarcastic formality, "I'll say good-bye, and thank you for—" Then

he caught sight of the two Georges and dropped the trunk. Bertha started to scream, and . . . George found himself looking out of the window of his shed at some tall weeds. The mug was still in his hand. He turned and saw Herbert Willet watching him expectantly. "Well?" Herbert said. He seemed slightly skeptical. "When's it going to work?"

"Did," George said, and put the mug down. "I don't seem to've moved, though."

"Never budged," Herbert said. He had an agnostic air, and George decided to keep his adventure to himself, and pass it off as a joke.

"Well, next time I'll have to use a bit more of the Mummy Powder, eh?" He laughed and got up. "I expect it takes more for a man than a mouse. Herbert got up, too, and they went out, George locking up behind him.

"Tootle-oo," Herbert said, and left, shaking his head and stumbling over Tommy's roller-skate. George went into the house and looked at the cuckoo clock, from which Tommy had long since torn the cuckoo—2:15—just time to get to the bank and catch the train for Sydmouth.

In the railway carriage coming home George thought over what had happened tomorrow. Seemed a funny way to have to put it, but there it was. Here he was George Two—or would be next afternoon

—and he found he was hazily remembering something he couldn't be remembering. It was that business about intercepting Johnny Glow on the train on Friday at Perly Junction, instead of going to his place at Sydmouth. That part was all right, but he seemed to remember finding out Johnny's skipped, so's to avoid paying off . . . And that could only mean there'd been another first time around—and now he was going to forestall it by going to Perly Junction.

This was more than odd—it didn't make sense, unless . . . unless this way he'd altered the future—or was going to. Still, why not? If there was such a thing as free will one altered the future all the time, whenever we exerted our free will. But something retroactive must have occurred—or was going to occur. Perhaps that was all right—retroactive in the future—altering the past in the future. He gave it up: it was too confusing. One thing, though; Johnny Glow had given him a very open, straightforward look as he took his bet. That was a bad sign with some people.

He got home in plenty of time to do the books, and after supper he went to the shed and compounded more of his coal derivative, a lot more. When it got too dark—tenuous, in England in July—he had a small swig of port and returned to the house and bed.

Lizzy opened the door between their rooms, and harranged him about inconsequentialities until he dozed off . . . Sweet Dreams.

The next morning was like others: Bolter appeared with the post and said, "Gointerbeiot," and a manservant from the Hall brought a prescription for Sir Humfrey, with the admonition that speed was vital, and George made it up at once. For a merry instant he considered putting in a stiff dosage of the coal derivative—do the noisy old bastard good to wake up and find himself in the year God-knows-what. Cool off his nasty temper, it would, but he refrained.

After a normally disgusting luncheon, which he was too tense to eat, anyway, and after hearing his family discuss their plans for the afternoon, George set out for the Hall to deliver the medicine. When he got to the bridge he remembered the appointment with himself, and threw the bottle into the river. It was only a mild tonic, after all, and Sir Humfrey's household would be the better off if he were deprived of it. He turned and retraced his steps, to be greeted by Lizzy's "How did you get around to the front?" etc. He went into the shop, and shortly George One appeared, but this time it was no shock to see himself.

"Hello, Georgie!" he said, and thought how foolish he, George One, was looking—or had looked.

The scenes that followed have been described, suffice it to say that when he left his alter ego at the door of the shop, he noticed with amusement his wife's look of sour disapproval in the window turn to incredulity as George One went in to her.

A few moments later he found himself passing Tanner & Son, Drapers, and through the window he espied Geof Thompkin, talking on the telephone—no doubt to George One. He waved gaily, and Geof Thompkin waved back—only to start and gape with disbelief. George went on, and at the bridge passed his daughter and her unsuitable suiter.

"Hello, Dads," Phyllis said mincingly, for the benefit of her companion.

"Tell your mother to keep her shirt on," George replied and continue to the station. Here, as we know, he forehandedly bought a ticket to Perly Junction—a matter of five miles from Freem, and on the London, Brighton and South Coast line. There he waited for the through train—a matter of twenty minutes. During the wait he noticed his friend Constable Tate passing by on the road on a bicycle—probably on his way home for tea. He hailed him and explained his errand.

"It'll only take a sec, Bill," he said. "Johnny Glow'll have the day's take on him, and he'll cough up my winnings the moment he

sees you're with me. The station-master says they have a five-minute wait here so there'll be plenty of time. All you have to do is stand there."

The prospect of merely standing and, by his very presence, causing Justice to be done, appealed to Constable Tate, and Johnny, whose printed slogan was "Johnny Never Owes"—was constrained in this instance to live up to it. The three went their several ways: Tate to his tea, Johnny, much, much poorer, onward to London where he eventually became a captain in the Salvation Army and led a blameless life, and George Medley back by local to Freem. So, inevitably, History retraced itself—up to Lizzy's hoarse accusation of drunkenness, and the dropping of Walter's trunk. George then witnessed what he had previously missed: the sudden cessation of George One—and the result was decisive. Bertha fainted, and Lizzy was speechless.

It takes time, with a shock of this sort, for self-confidence and aplomb to reassert themselves, and it was not until after the quick departure of the in-laws that Lizzy found the words to express her deep resentment. "Well I *never!*" she said, with complete truthfulness. The unbelievable intrusion of the identical brother was bad enough, but his disappearance was an outrage. Yet, hold: on second thought it had surely not been he,

but her own George who had done the disappearing. She stared at him closely—and there could be no mistake; the spot of ketchup on the tie, the button missing still from the coat, that she had put off replacing, every familiar detail told her that this was her husband. Everything except the look in his eye—and that was at once dominant and jaunty—not familiar at all.

"How about those chops?" said George, and she went.

George next closeted himself within his shed, where he composed a letter to Lizzy—the crab-apple of his eye—and another to his bank. The former explained that he was going away, that it would be idle to look for him, that she could in time divorce him for disappearance, that she would be provided for. The other letter requested the bank to convey his property, real and otherwise, to Lizzy, and gave the bank power of attorney. He then went out and posted the bank's letter, and returned and slipped the other into the tea caddy. With it he also put eleven thousand pounds Sterling—retaining one thousand as working capital to give himself a start in the future. It would be surely worth *something*, even though money had a way of depreciating over the years, and betting . . . well, that was a mixed evil which would always be with us.

Then back to the shed, after a for-*once* quiet and delicious supper. And now he compounded not a pill but a draught, a bumper, of his elixir. Just as he was about to drink it a figure appeared at his elbow. He started, and saw that it was again himself, but this time dressed most oddly. Tie-less, and with loud shirt and knickers, the latest George gazed at him with indulgent amusement.

"Now, don't *you* go and faint!" said George-the-Third.

"What . . . what . . ." George-the-Present was nonplussed.

"Just thought I'd pop back and surprise myself," said the other. "And leave this." He produced a thick packet of currency. "Lizzy's going to lose most of that eleven thou' by trying to run the shop as a confectioner's, so we'll just leave this here and when she has to sell the place she'll find it when she comes over here to pack up."

There was silence for a while, and finally George, (our one), said, "How's it going to be in the future?"

"A bit of all right, old son! You'll see!"

"But how did you—I—get back? That's *reverse* time travel, isn't it?"

"Easy. Used a bit of meteorite, instead of coat. It contains an isotope of—"

"A what?"

"Oh, never mind—you'll find out. Anyway, I'm leaving in half a shake as I only took a little of the stuff. About three point one min- " He was gone.

George Medley picked up the packet of money, stowed it behind the port bottle and sat down. Through the window he saw Lizzy look out of the kitchen door, and sniff disdainfully at the universe. He shrugged, and drank his potion. And if you are young, and happen to live to a tremendously ripe old age, and go to the right part of England, you will find him—living in a vine-clad, plastic cottage with all the modern conveniences, and with his new wife who will be; not pale, not thin, not . . . But you've heard all that.

