

L. RON HUBBARD



**One
Was
Stubborn**

GALAXY
PRESENTS

Author's Note

This present manuscript is a paraphrase of one which is very strange indeed. I have included in it all its essentials and have removed from it only that which was rambling and incoherent. The original came to me in the hands of a peculiar old fellow who was admitted for treatment to Balm Springs. He had a very stubborn quality about him which made him nearly impossible to treat, and this intractability earned for him the pseudonym of Old Shellback among the interns and psychiatrists.

Oddly, he came with no past history and refused to give any. No one could learn, for some time, where he had been born or whether he had any people alive. And then, one day, with a rock-jawed glare at my insistence, he said:

"My mother and father have yet to be born. If I have any ancestors living in this country now I am positive I won't see them. The place I was born will not be built for another three hundred years and, when I was born in it, it was already two hundred and fifty years old. It is gone because it has yet to exist. It will be gone thereafter because it will cease to exist.

"I am a negative five hundred and ninety years old. Tomorrow, my birthday, I shall be a negative five hundred and eighty-nine. I have less than thirty years of life expectancy remaining to me and so I shall not live to be more than a negative five hundred and sixty years.

“What has happened to me has happened because of what happened to the Universe. But mainly because there is but one god and his name will be George Smiley.

“You haven’t tried to make me do anything. Therefore I shall give you the manuscript which explains this. I wrote it when I was marooned a little while, about eighty years from now, in Paris just after the United States began to rebuild it.”

And so he brought me the manuscript. It had evidently been written under stress, for the first half-dozen pages are illegible as compared to the graceful script of the remainder.

Old Shellback grew restless after he had been with us six or seven months, for he seemed to sense danger in all clocks. In fact a man had only to take out a watch and Old Shellback would dive for his cubicle and refuse to come forth the rest of the day. Then he began to mutter, over and over, “Not far enough back. Not far enough back. Not far enough back.” Nothing could be found as the cause of this, but Old Shellback seemed to think the menace quite valid. And then one day he came rushing into my office—it was a New Year’s Day—and demanded his original manuscript which, of course, I gave him. I had no thought of what he might do and what he did was quite startling.

Old Shellback was seen to lock himself into his room. There was no egress therefrom.

An hour later, when he would not respond, we forced the door.

On the bed was a scrawled note:

“My apologies to Dr. LaFayette. But this is not far enough back, you see. Not far enough back!”

Old Shellback was gone!

One Was Stubborn

I thought it was my vision. For some time my wife had been nagging me about glasses, telling me that I ought to get those Brilloscopes that were always being advertised on the three-dimensional color television. But somehow the more I heard “See like a cat and feel like a million with Brilloscopes, the Invisible Optic Aids,” the less inclined I was to get a pair.

And so when I beheld a pair of legs walking toward me all by themselves, I, of course, concluded that it was my vision. In fact, for some days things had been getting slightly misty and the mist was deepening. But to see a pair of legs with pants neatly pressed and shoes precisely tied walk up to you and by you and around the corners—well, even I could see that I must give in.

I stepped onto the express conveyer belt and went whizzing off toward the Medical Center, and as I sped along I again received a shock. The great glistening domes of Science Center, usually so plainly seen from all levels of the city save the third trucking tier under the glass subways, were missing one of their number. I supposed, of course, that the Transstellar Express might have swished too close to it on the night before, but I was wrong. For when I diverted my eyes for

a moment to avoid being struck by a fat woman's antigravity cane and then looked through the invisible super-levels at the place where the dome had been, the dome was back in place! I certainly did need glasses!

I was so groggy when I stepped off the conveyer belt and grabbed the scoop which lifted up to the medical department level that I didn't even see a crazy college student swing off Level 20 in his antique Airable Swishabout—one of those things with signs over the dents saying, "Eve, Here's Your Atom," and "Ten Tubes All Disintegrating," and "Hey, Babe, didn't we meet on Mars?" You know the menace. Well, one of those blasted straight at me and I didn't even have time to duck—and I probably couldn't have anyway, thanks to my rheumatism.

And if I had been startled before, I was prostrate now. That Swishabout rattled to the right and left and above and below and was gone. I'd passed all the way through it!

I was almost scared to let go of the bucket and step out on the Eye Level for fear the invisible walk was not only invisible but also not there!

Somehow I hauled myself up to the sorting psycher while the beam calculators sized me up and then, when the flasher had blinked "Dr. Flerry" as its decision for me, I managed to sink down on the sofa which whisked me into his office.

The nurse smiled pleasantly and said, "Nervous disability is quite easy to correct and Dr. Flerry is expert. Please be calm."

"I haven't got any nervous disability," I said. "I came up here to get tested for some glasses."

She looked at one of those confounded charts that the

sorting psycher forwards ahead of the patient, and when I saw her finger come down to “Stubborn” I knew she’d nod. She did. A thoroughly unmanageable young woman.

“You haven’t been brought to an eye doctor,” she said. “Dr. Flerry treats nervous disability only, as you must know.”

“I came for an eye test,” I said, “and I’m going to get an eye test. I don’t give a flimdoodle what that blathery card says; it’s *eyes*. Do you think a machine knows more about me than I do?”

“Sometimes a machine does. Now please don’t get upset.”

“I’m not upset. I guess I know when I need glasses and when I don’t need glasses. And if I want to be tested for glasses, I pretty well guess I’ll be tested for glasses!”

“You,” she said, “are obviously a stubborn sort of fellow.”

“I guess,” I said, “that I am the most stubborn fellow in this city if not in this whole country.”

“Don’t tell me,” she said.

Well, I don’t know why, but I felt a little better after that. And shortly, Dr. Flerry buzzered me into his inner office. He was one of these disgusting young fellows who think they know so much about the human body that they themselves can’t be human.

“Now be calm,” he said, “and tell me just what the trouble is.” He seemed to be in a sort of ecstatic state and he didn’t seem to take me seriously enough.

“I won’t be calm,” I said, “and I don’t have to tell you what the trouble is. You’ve got a psycher chart there that will tell you all about me even down to my last wart.”

“Yes,” he said, “you do have a wart. I shall have Dr. Dremster remove it before you go.”

“You won’t touch any wart of mine,” I said. “I came in here to get a pair of glasses, and by the Eternal, I’ll get them if I have to sit here all night.”

I guess I had him there, for he sat and stared at me for some little time before he replied.

Finally he said, “Now just what is making you nervous?”

“I am *not* nervous!” I shouted. “I want glasses!”

“Ah,” he said. And then he sat back and pushed his head against a pad so the mechanical chair arm would put a lighted cigarette in his mouth. “My dear fellow, tell me just why you need a pair of glasses.”

“Because I need them, that’s why!”

“Reading glasses?”

“Reading glasses!” I said. “I never read any of the bilge the papers are ordered to publish.”

“Then you watch the televisior quite a bit?”

“I wouldn’t turn one of those things on for a million dollars. What do you ever hear but advertising and smoky bands, and what do you see but girls with legs? Bah!” I guess I was telling him now.

“Ah,” he said and thumped back with an elbow so that his chair’s arm would pour him a glass of water. “But you don’t need glasses to talk to people.”

“I never talk to people. I never talk to anybody except my wife and I don’t talk to her and she doesn’t listen to me any more than I listen to her. She never says three words a week to me anyway.” Which is the way things should be, of course.

“What, may I ask, is your business?”

“You’ve got a nerve to ask, but for your information I haven’t got any business. I retired off my farm about four years ago and I haven’t spent a happy hour since.”

“Ah,” he said.

“Don’t sit there saying ‘Ah’ like an idiot,” I said. “Get busy and fit me with a pair of glasses.”

“You haven’t said why you needed them. You can have them of course, but to give them to you I’ll have to know just what sort of glasses you mean. What convinced you that you should have them?”

I could see that I had scared Dr. Flerry into being polite to me, so I told him that I had seen a pair of legs without a torso and had first missed and then seen one of the Medical Center domes and how that crazy college student had run right through me.

Well, if Dr. Flerry hadn’t stopped laughing when he did I guess we would have mixed it up right then.

“What’s so funny?” I demanded.

“Why, my dear fellow,” said Dr. Flerry, “you don’t need any glasses. If you ever paid any attention to the newspapers or the televisions or talked to anyone, you’d understand what is happening.”

“And what,” said I, “is happening?”

“Why, my dear fellow, is it possible that you haven’t heard of the Messiah?”

“Him,” I said. “What about *him*?”

“Would you care to come around to our meeting tonight? You might be edified.”

“I don’t like meetings. I don’t believe in meetings.”

“But my dear fellow, the Messiah will—”

“I don’t believe in messiahs.”

“Well, however that may be, I wonder at you. You are probably the only man in the world today who is not a follower. Let me explain to you what this is all about so that—”

“I don’t want to know anything about it and I wouldn’t believe it if I did.”

“Nevertheless, let me tell you something of this. The Messiah from Arcturus Arcton is teaching the nonexistence of matter. You see, by that he means that all matter is an idea. And it is high time that the world was relieved from the crushing load of materialism which has almost quenched the soul of man. Those are his words. And it’s true. Man is being pushed all around by machines and the age of machines has been over for a century, but the machines just keep running, and man, because he is so lazy, keeps using them. Now it may surprise you that a man such as myself, dependent upon the ills of the body as I am, should advocate the loss of the body. But I get no real interest out of my trade, for everything about the body is known except, of course, the soul and the Messiah has a good line on that. Further, in common with the rest of humanity, I am bored. I am so bored that I welcome any diversion. And I know that all this material world and this body I drag around are useless sources of annoyance.

“Now the Messiah is teaching us the folly of belief. So long as we believe in this world, this Universe, in machines and ills and mankind, then mankind shall survive and the world, the Universe and machines shall survive. But as soon as we

lose all belief in these things, then we shall be freed. We shall be freed, my friend, from the agony caused by machines and other men. And, being slaves to cogwheels, the only answer is to abolish the very matter from which those same cogwheels and these bodies are made. Well! Matter does not really exist, you know. It is only a figment of our imaginations. We believe in matter and so there is matter. That, my dear fellow, is the glorious message you have missed by not listening or reading.”

“You mean,” I said, “that everybody belongs to this?”

“Certainly. Hasn’t the whole world been miserable ever since all further advance was unattainable? And isn’t this the one answer to our misery?”

“But . . . but where will everyone go?” I said.

“Why, we return to our proper position as a compound idea. And there we shall have nothing that is miserable or worrying—”

“But you won’t even exist!”

“Certainly not,” he said with a tired smile. And he nudged with his elbow and tilted his head back while his chair’s arm poured another glass of water down his throat. Languidly then he nodded to me.

“You don’t need glasses, my dear fellow. You are only witnessing the fruits of our combined disbelief. Several people happened to disbelieve that dome and then the college student probably didn’t believe in his Swishabout, and you, about to be killed by it, refused to believe in it either. So come around to our meeting tonight and hear all about it. It is really quite fascinating.” He yawned in boredom and pushed a pedal which shot my sofa car out to the Eye Level again.