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IN A BODY

by J. T. McIntosh



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TIME PAYMENT

By SYLVIA JACOBS

*The whereabouts of a
hideaway can be found—but
what about the whenabouts?*

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Slick Tennant had a hunch. The sixth sense that had made him king of the local rackets, that had warned him in time when three of his men fell to the machine guns of a rival gang, now told him that the Feds were after him, that they had evidence to send him up for a long stretch. But he was going where even the Feds couldn't extradite him.

Slick Tennant was going to hide in the future.

They didn't call him Slick for nothing. For months, a private dick in his pay had shadowed Dr. Richard Porter, inventor of a device called by reporters a time-travel machine, by comedians a crystal ball, and by Dr. Porter's fellow-psychiatrists a Metachronoscope. Slick knew the doctor was a widower, knew where he lived, knew pressure could be put upon him through Dickie Porter, aged seven. In Slick's pocket was a house-key Dr. Porter thought he had lost two weeks ago.

But Slick hadn't disclosed his intentions to anyone. The chauffeur of his bullet-proof car let him out several miles from the Porter residence. Strolling along the street, Slick might have been any citizen on his way home. A hat shadowed his features as he passed under the street lights, and he carried a briefcase. He hailed a cruising cab and proceeded to a spot two blocks from the Porter home, being careful not to tip too much or too little to attract the driver's attention.

Dr. Porter propped an elbow on his nillow, trying to orient himself in the

... then propped an elbow on the piano, trying to shake himself from the fuzziness that follows a midnight awakening. He stifled a gasp, and sat up suddenly, as he saw that the man silhouetted against the living room lamp had pajama-clad Dickie by the arm. The child was rubbing his eyes, but there wasn't a whimper out of him.

"I got a gun on the kid," the man said. "I like kids and I won't hurt him if you do what I say."

The doctor struggled to keep his voice soothing and professional. "Of course you wouldn't," he said. "You don't want to go back to the hospital."

The man laughed. "I ain't one of your nuts, Doc. And I don't want your money. I got plenty. All I want from you is a little trip in your time machine."

"Metachronoscope," corrected the doctor. "It's very misleading to call it a time-travel machine."

Letting go of the boy, Slick dealt Dr. Porter a vicious slap. "That'll learn you not to pull none of your high-brow stuff. Is it my fault I had to quit school to keep the family from starvin' when my old man got sent up? If Slick Tennant says it's a time-travel machine, that's what you call it, see?"

"Yes, I see," Dr. Porter said faintly. The mention of gangland's most dreaded name had more effect on him than the blow.

"Now let's get something else straight. Once, on TV, they said a couple of guys came back. Another time, the news program said they couldn't come back and give tips on the ponies. Which is right? Can you bring me back any time you want to?"

"Absolutely not. The decision is irrevocable. The public's impression that the future can be altered or predicted is incorrect."

"Fine. I don't want to come back. And I don't need to change the future, neither. Things may be different, but a smart cookie can always get along. Now, according to the news, you only sent these guys ahead a year. That ain't enough. What's the most you could send me ahead?"

"Theoretically, we could send a subject ahead as much as twenty years, if we

could find anyone who would consent to that, and undoubtedly we could learn a great deal more by so doing."

"But you did find out that the boys come through okay?"

"Yes. We sent these two men ahead in 1961. When they returned to awareness, it was 1962. Physically and mentally they were as fit as before."

"Did they know what happened to them?"

"Well, the year had no apparent duration for them, but they had normal speed memories of the intervening year when they returned to awareness. Evidently their fore-memories for the entire year must have been condensed into the brief period they were in the field. From this phenomenon, we derive the term 'sending the subjects ahead' which has so often been misinterpreted. But it's important to note that these condensed fore-memories were not available until twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the events, which means the future cannot be effectively predicted by present techniques."

That sounded like plain English; it sounded as if it meant something, but Slick wasn't quite sure what. He seized on the last remark, which he understood.

"What did you build this gadget for, if you can't tell fortunes with it?" he asked.

"The layman thinks in terms of immediate practical application. But our primary objective was knowledge of the human mind. We confirmed the existence of mental capacities that have been suspected for centuries. We formulated the axiom that awareness is a function of subconscious fore-memories becoming currently available. We experimentally suspended awareness without inducing unconsciousness, by causing the fore-memories to condense. I hope the process will develop into a useful tool for my profession, that we learn how to superimpose conditioning on the blank area to produce rational, socially acceptable action, rather than the literal and irrational compulsion which is a drawback to implanting post-hypnotic commands. But I can't tell you at this point where our research will lead."

This double-talk had Slick going around in circles. But he had a strong hunch that taking a trip in the machine was the right thing to do, and he wasn't going to let Porter divert him from that.

"Let's get down to cases, Doc. Just exactly what's going to happen to me when I get in this machine?"

"It's difficult to explain the process in lay terms, particularly under stress. But this may help you to understand it. Have you ever had the experience of going back to sleep for a few moments after you awoke in the morning, and dreaming a long, involved dream?"

"Sure. I get some good hunches that way."

"Then you know the dream may cover a period of hours, days, or even years. People in the dream move and speak at a normal speed. Yet when you awaken again and look at the clock, you see that only a few minutes or even seconds have elapsed. A motion picture of the events in the dream would be nothing but a gabble and a blur, if projected at such terrific speed."

"Yeah, that's right. I had that happen plenty of times, and I always thought it was kind of funny."

"It demonstrates the capacity of the human mind to function independently of the limitations of chronological time. And premonitory experiences—what you call hunches—give us an inkling of the fore-memory phenomenon. In our dreams, the past, future, literal and symbolical material mingles. But by subjecting the physical brain to a certain type of electro-magnetic field, we can isolate the fore-memories, condensed as in the dream, while the subject acts as if in a waking state."

"Does it hurt when a guy's brain goes into this field?"

"Not at all. Awareness and physical sensations are totally suspended. The elapsing time has no apparent duration. That means you can't feel anything at all, you don't know what has happened until later, and twenty hours or even twenty years pass in a second, as far as your mind is concerned."

"Why in the hell didn't you give me that straight, instead of dragging in all this dream business? That's just what I'm looking for, just what I figured it would be from the news stories. Do you throw this here field ahead or does the time machine travel along with the guy inside?"

Dr. Porter sighed slightly. The man had a preconceived idea, and nothing Porter

had said had altered it in the slightest. "The machine doesn't actually travel," he explained patiently. "That's why I objected to calling it a time-travel machine. It exists here and now and it will exist in the future, I suppose."

"You mean it'll be there when I come out of the field?"

"I said I suppose so. Why should that concern you, particularly?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Slick Tennant pays off two ways. Maybe you only heard about the times he paid off guys for crossing him, but he pays off guys that help him, too. I'm paying for your help by giving you a chance to save your skin. I got a hand grenade in this briefcase. When I get through with that machine, I'm going to blow her to little, bitty pieces. Maybe you can't bring me back, but I don't want you to have the machine to send the cops after me, neither. By the time you get a new machine built, my trail will be cold."

Intellectually, Dr. Porter accepted the concept of the inevitability of events. If Slick was going to blow up the machine, he was going to blow it up. Still the old, old human habit of trying to control the future kept obstinately insinuating itself.

"But you don't need to destroy the machine," he protested. "Look, let me try to explain—"

"I thought you'd try to talk me out of it," Slick said ominously. "I know that a lot of money and work went into that gadget, but I got to blow her up. You should be glad you're not on my list or you'd get blown up with her. And I got no time for any more talkin'. I found out all I want to know. Now, get up and get dressed, and make it snappy. You're going to drive me over to the University."

Porter had been careful not to make any moves that might alarm his unbidden guest; he swung his feet obediently over the side of the bed. "Is Dickie going with us?" he asked.

"You're damned right he is. I don't want you high-signing any cops on the way, and the kid might even be sharp enough to phone the station himself, if we left him here." He didn't add that he had an even better reason for taking the boy.

"Then let him get some clothes on, too. It's cold outside." To his son, Dr. Porter added, "Don't be afraid, Dickie. Everything is going to be all right."

"Sure, Daddy," the boy said sturdily. "You just do like he says. He's like the bad guys on TV."

"You got a smart kid, Porter," Slick said, grinning. "Knows when to keep his trap shut and what to say when he opens it. That's more than some of the hoods in this town know."

Driving down the freeway toward the University campus, Slick and the boy sat in the back seat of Dr. Porter's car. Slick tried the kid on his lap for size; it was a nice fit. The papers said the time machine was a two-passenger job, but if that wasn't the straight dope, Slick could hold the kid on his lap, like this.

The gangster squeezed Dickie's small hand. "You're all right, boy. Plenty of guys a lot bigger than you would be bawlin' if Slick Tennant invited them to take a little ride. If I ever have a kid of my own, I'd want one just like you." He tucked a bill in the pocket of Dickie's jacket. "This is to buy you a play gat or something."

"Thank you, Mr. Slick," the boy said gravely.

Though business compelled him to do things like rubbing out the competition, Slick was really soft-hearted. Some of the proceeds of his illicit activities were devoted each year to buying Christmas trees, turkeys, and toys for poor children. He kind of hated to separate Dickie Porter from his father, but it was the only way he could see to insure a safe passage through time.

And then, Slick reflected, he *would* have a kid of his own, or at least one he was responsible for. Slick decided then and there that he would send the boy to the fanciest high-class boarding school they had in the future, the kind the millionaire kids went to. Dickie would have a pony, a bike, a dog, plenty of fried chicken and strawberry shortcake, all the things Slick had yearned for in his own slum childhood. He would live in the country, where there were miles of fresh green grass to play on, and he would wear a silver-studded cowboy suit with real spurs. Unless the kids where they were going would be wearing space-pilot suits instead. By gosh, that would be something. Maybe Slick could take the kid on a luxury cruise to the Moon.

To provide these things, Slick would have to follow the only trade he knew, move in on the local mobs. But he wouldn't let Dickie mix with hoods and

racketeers. Dickie would study to be something respectable, a mouthpiece or maybe a doctor like his old man. Dickie would have all the advantages a kid could ask for—everything except a real father.

He might even have that, come to think of it. Dr. Porter might easily live another twenty years, now that Slick had warned him to get away from the machine before it was blown up. First, Slick would get some plastic surgery, so Porter and any other old ducks who were still alive wouldn't recognize him. There ought to be a lot of improvements in plastic surgery in twenty years. Probably a guy could even get his fingerprints changed. Then he would hire a private dick to look up Porter.

Slick pictured the aged father being reunited with the son he'd lost twenty years before, seeing the child just as he'd been at the moment of parting, with Slick playing Santa Claus in the background, sending the kid a roll of thousand-dollar bills with a pink ribbon around it for a present. It was such a touching thought that tears came to the gangster's eyes, as they did when he watched a sad movie.

He was sorry he couldn't let Porter and the boy in on his plans right now, but he wasn't ready to tip his hand.

The machine was a two-passenger job, all right. Slick could tell that the minute he saw it. There was no enclosure, just two reclining barber chairs fixed on two circular plates sunk in a platform. After the switch was set, Porter had explained, the additional weight of an occupant of the chair would complete the contact and the field would build up. Slick examined the control panel, particularly the dial, which was calibrated into twenty sections, each for a ninety-second exposure to the field.

"You did say twenty years, didn't you?" Dr. Porter asked.

"If that's the limit," Slick replied tersely, "like I heard."

"How old are you?"

"You mean can my ticker take it? Well, I'm forty-five. They tell me I don't look it." Slick was vain of his black hair, without a thread of gray in it.

"No, you don't look it. But let me take your pulse and blood pressure."

He submitted, without letting go of either his gun or brief case.

"You seem to be in good shape, as nearly as I can tell from a superficial examination. But don't you want to reconsider this twenty-year arrangement? I can't change the setting once you're in the chair, you know. Are you sure you understand that the only thing affected will be your own subjective experience, that time will go on just as it always has, but that you won't be aware of anything between now and twenty years from now?"

"Sure. You told me that three-four times already. What are you trying to do? Stall till help gets here?" Slick asked suspiciously.

"I'm not stalling," the doctor said. "In fact, I'm only too glad to find someone to whom the present means so little that he's willing to go into a twenty-year blank. But ethics insist that I warn you."

He turned the switch to the twenty-year mark.

"I'm ready," he said.

"Whaddya mean, warn me?" Slick snapped. "Is this thing booby trapped?"

"Certainly not. I have merely tried to explain that it is not exactly what you anticipated—"

"You know what I'm drivin' at. Have you got the machine set to electrocute me or explode the grenade? A lot of you respectable citizens don't figure a guy like me is exactly human. You wouldn't call it murder to rub me out. You'd think you was doin' the town a favor."

"Some people would, perhaps, but I'm a doctor, not a judge. I've spent my life trying to find out what makes men like you act as they do, not in devising means of punishing them. But even if I wanted to do you bodily harm, I couldn't. The machine has a built-in safety factor."

This was where Slick sprang a little surprise.

"You willing to bet your kid's life on that?" he asked, picking up the boy.

He took two steps toward the platform, watching Porter's reactions. If the father

made a lunge toward the panel, Slick would know the setting was wrong. But Porter only stood stunned. The setting was safe, then, but Slick had only Porter's word that it couldn't be changed after contact. Maybe a change would be fatal to the passenger. So he would make sure there would be no changes.

"I always take out travel insurance. Doc," Slick said, and, stepping onto the platform, he put the boy gently into one of the chairs and reclined in the other himself.

"Dickie!" Dr. Porter cried.

It was the last thing Slick or the boy heard him say.

Slick came back to awareness of where he was and what he was doing. He was in one of the radial corridors, but at what compass point, at which level, and how many miles inside the outer walls of the city, he didn't know. He ran his fingers in a puzzled manner through his hair. He had never quite figured out the lettering system of the "circles" which weren't actually circles, but multagons.



He didn't even know what time it was. In this perpetual mock daylight, there was no change; there were no variations of seasons in this sterilized, irradiated, humidified, filtered, deodorized, oxygenated, constantly circulating seventy-five degrees. He remembered when streets used to have names, when you needed a street guide instead of a course in geometry to find your way around the city. He remembered when a city was many buildings, not one immense pyramid, when you wore dark glasses against the sun's glare on the pavements, when a Santa Ana blew dust over everything or smog stung your eyes, when people drove their cars into the downtown congestion instead of leaving them on the outskirts, when they said to each other, "There hasn't been enough rain this year," because there was no weather control and water for the lawns came all the way from the Colorado instead of from the nearby Pacific.

That was the trouble—his mind slipped back to the old days, his memories got out of sequence, and he wandered away from Recidivist Gardens, the only place he felt comfortable and at home. Dr. Tyson said it was because he had been in the field so long that time, twenty years ago.

A young man was staring at him, and Slick looked down at himself. No wonder the young man was staring! To his shame, Slick saw that he was wearing some kind of clothes, and worst of all, he was wearing them inside the city! Where had he found them? The only possible explanation was that he had drawn them out on his museum card. These scrambled-sequence attacks were becoming more embarrassing each time!

"Don't act so flustered, Pop," the young man said. "Nobody saw you but me. Take 'em off and I'll put 'em in the lost-and-found chute for you. Or are you on your way to a costume ball?"

Slick looked over the railing of the balcony. There were several people waiting for elevators and radial cars on the level below, all decently naked, of course, but the young man was right. Nobody else had seen Slick's shame. Hurriedly, he stepped out of the uncomfortable clothes and rolled them into a bundle. The young man took it from him.

"You're very kind—thank you so much," Slick said.

"Think nothing of it," the young man said. "What address should I put on this stuff?"

"Just Recidivist Gardens. They'll take care of it in the office. I hope you don't think all of us at the Gardens do peculiar things like this. It's just that—well, it's a long story, but they didn't start my conditioning until I'd been in the blank five years. I'm not capable of anything really anti-social, you understand, but I get what they call sequence scrambles. Sometimes I act as if I were living in the past. I'm not crazy, though. The doctors at the Gardens assure me I'm not crazy."

"Of course you're not," the young man said soothingly. "But that's a long blank—five years."

"I went the limit, really. Twenty years."

"Then you must be the man they call Slick!"

"You've heard of my case?"

"I was with you the night you made my father put us in the field."

"Dickie Porter! How you have grown! I've always told your father I didn't want to meet you. He said if it was going to happen, it would, whether he introduced us or not. But I hate to face you, after taking such a large slice out of your life—"

"But I'm still young. You're the one who's had the worst of it, because when you come out of the blank, you won't have so many years left. But you have the comfort of knowing you really did something worth while. Your case and mine have been invaluable to the research, particularly yours, because it was with you that my father developed the conditioning techniques. If it hadn't been for you, it would have been very difficult to find anyone willing to draw a twenty-year blank."

"No. Not even a lifer would want that. But I don't take any credit for it. I did it only because I was so bull-headed I wouldn't listen to what Dr. Porter was trying to tell me."

"I came out of it six months ago," the young man said. "Now I can consciously hear, and feel, and smell, just like other people. I don't have to wait till tomorrow to remember what I said to somebody today, or what tonight's dinner tasted like."

"I'm so glad to hear that!" Slick said. "Dr. Tyson says I should be coming out of it soon, too. Say, wait a minute—I heard what you said just now—I'm hearing what I said myself—why, I've had full sensory impressions for several minutes now, but it kind of sneaked up on me—"

The young man seized Slick's hand and pumped it vigorously. "Congratulations! You're out of it!"

"Oh, this is wonderful, wonderful! It's like—like coming back to life. I must go home and tell Dr. Tyson at once! Please go with me. It'll do you good to get out of the city. We're the only two people who've drawn such a long blank—we have so much in common. I'll fix you a chicken dinner. I raise my own. Just think, to taste my own fried chicken!"

"I wish I could go, but it'll have to be some other time. I have a date for the opera. When you see it on the Tri-di-cast you'll know my girl and I are in the studio audience."

"Oh, a girl!" Slick said. "Of course there'd be a girl, now that you're out of the blank. I won't keep you. But there's just one thing I must ask you—do you ever remember ahead? Consciously, that is?"

"A few times. But the conscious fore-memories are mixed with post-memories and impossible to place according to dates. It's the same objection that applies when people remember ahead in dreams—you don't know which part of the dream is a fore-memory until it happens."

"Maybe some day they'll learn to sort those conscious fore-memories out. If I could do it, I would know whether you are ever coming to see me."

"I will come," the young man promised. "Believe me, I will."

Absorbed in his newly found sensations, Slick took the elevator a hundred and thirty-three floors to ground level, reminding himself not to go too far and wind up in one of the sixty levels below ground. Then he stopped the North-by-Northwest radial car and punched the button for city limits, thus avoiding the necessity of dealing with the circle lettering system.

He sat in the speeding little car, watching the faces of the other passengers, until each, in turn, got off at their respective stops. Got off to go to luxurious apartments that were nothing more than cells, with four-sided soundproofing separating neighbor from neighbor, with air, newspapers, prepared meals and all other deliveries coming by chute. How could they bury themselves in the ugly angularity of masonry and steel? How could they, who had always had full senses, deny themselves the sting of wind, the scent of soil and grass, the sound and sight of ocean breakers? How the world had changed in his lifetime, with people who had never committed anti-social acts imprisoning themselves, while those who had needed conditioning enjoyed the therapy of freedom.

When the car reached city limits, the door opened automatically and Slick, the only passenger left, passed through the shower that sprayed his skin with a porous, temporary plastic coating against the chill outside air. He walked across the thick ground-cover, exquisitely aware of the sensation of softness under his feet, leaving the awesome bulk of the city behind.

Before him swept the expanse of Recidivist Gardens, on gently rolling hills, bordering the sea. Clearly though he remembered it, this was the first time he had seen it with full and immediate sensory impact. The moon silvered the

foliage, cast a path upon the water. Here and there, lights were on in the cottages nestled among the foliage, the domed, transparent cottages that combined the psychological effect of living outdoors with the comfort of shelter. The sweet note of a bell buoy clove the night.

The beauty was almost unbearable, coming so sharply to long blanked-out senses. The return of immediate awareness, and the knowledge that Dickie Porter, the only human being with whom he had a kinship of experience, did not hate him, was too much happiness for one day. Slick breathed deeply of the salt air, and felt a catch in his heart. He raised a thin hand to his chest.

The young man who had spoken to Slick in the radial corridor found the obituary item in the newspaper he took from the chute with his breakfast next morning.

Louis G. Tennant, 65, known to his friends as "Slick," a resident of Recidivist Gardens, died of a heart attack about 2200 last night, while returning to his home after a visit to central Ellay.

Tennant was one of the first recidivists to benefit from the Porter socio-legal conditioning techniques, and was noted for his valuable contribution to science in volunteering in 1963 for a twenty-year blank. He was one of two men who have gone this far ahead, the other being Dr. Porter's son, Richard S. Porter, Jr., level 72, SSE, circle NA, apt. 1722.

The Tennant case did much to direct public attention to the Porter techniques, helping to pave the way for a drastic revision of the criminal statutes, and to establish the concept that punishment rather than treatment for anti-social acts is as barbarous as punishment rather than treatment for the insane.

When informed of the death, and asked whether subconscious fore-memories of these developments motivated Tennant to volunteer as a research subject, Dr. Richard Porter, U.C.L.A., said that the effect of subconscious fore-memories as a compulsion to action is as yet imperfectly understood. He stated, however, that in certain individuals, the fore-memory compulsive factor appears to operate closer to the conscious level than in others. He said that, before going into the blank, Tennant was noted for the strength and reliability of his "hunches." He also recalled that Tennant and Richard Porter, Jr., were the last two subjects treated in the original Metachronoscope, which was destroyed shortly thereafter in an explosion. Subsequent models have been modified and improved.

Tennant's estate was willed to the Recidivists' Christmas Fund for Dependent Children. According to Dr. Claude Tyson of Recidivist Hospital, Tennant was still in the blank when he died.

The closing sentence of the item was wrong, Dick Porter thought. In his last hours, Slick had known how it felt to be alive again, after twenty years.

Dick Porter was the only human being who fully appreciated what that meant.

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