

CLAY SUBURB

*Robert Young's most recent appearance here was "Lord of Rays" (July). Now
he turns
his hand to a story of multiple personalities, time-travel, and murder most foul*

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ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by JOE STATON

I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.

—R. L. Stevenson: "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"

Saturday, 8:51 P.M.; Roger Norbrook C:

Again I experience the sensation of falling through successive layers of ever more tenuous mist. (I say "again", although this is the first time I have experienced it directly.) It lasts but a moment—actually it is a mental ploy designed to soften the shock of instantaneous retrolocation—and I emerge in the by-now familiar alley. After looking around to see whether anyone observed my materialization (no one is present: no one ever is—it's that kind of an alley), I make my way to the street, cross to the other side and enter the Arabian Nights Cafe. The Cafe, owing partly to its nearness to the nexus, has been first on the list of my quarry's Saturnalian itineraries ever since his first pastrip.

I eliminated the alley as a potential *mise en scene* from the beginning. Although unfrequented, it is out of range of the nearest streetlight and much too tenebrous.

The street too, for obvious reasons, was out of the question. My quarry's arrival in the past, per se, will virtually guarantee that I won't be apprehended, but for me to risk being apprehended would be to break the rules. It is true they may no longer apply; but to be on the safe side, I intend to play the game as though they do.

(Roger Norbrook D: If posterity remembers my host, it will be less for his having invented a means of traveling into the past than for the effect his invention has had upon his multiple personality and for the unique use to which he has ultimately put it.

(Recently, for the sake of my sanity, I designated his various aspects as "A", "B" and "C", "A" representing Roger Norbrook proper, and "B" and "C" his secondary selves. Ironically, this has led me to think of myself as "D"—an outrageous misnomer indeed!)

Roger Norbrook C: After entering the cafe, I proceed directly to an unoccupied booth from which both the bar and the street door can be observed. The obsolete horn-rims I am wearing bother the bridge of my nose, and I cannot help feeling ludicrous in the outdated brown pinstripe I have on. But it was imperative that I employ at least a modicum of disguise.

I sit down to wait.

As I sit there, I sift my thoughts for any signs of moral turpitude. I find none, nor did I expect to. I was certain when I stepped into the field that my impassibility would immunize me against the side-effects of retrolocation my quarry attributes his freedom to.

Presently the waitress spies me and comes over to the booth. I order a glass of beer. After she brings it, I force myself to take a small swallow, then set it back down on the table. All of the lights in the room are shaded and/or on low beam: a sort of bluish gloom prevails.

Any moment now my quarry will step unsuspectingly into the room. While he is here I'll keep him

under surveillance, and when he leaves I'll follow him. Eventually he will provide me with an optimum opportunity to accomplish my purpose.

I lock my gaze on the street door.
I wait.

Saturday, 9:00 P. M.; Roger Norbrook B:

That evanescent feeling of falling through diaphanous mist; that sweet sense of freedom as the trans-temporal forces unleashed by my passage tear my winter garment of repentance away. The delirious ecstasy of being reborn . . .

I leave the alley, cross the street and enter the neon-inscribed oasis of the Arabian Nights Cafe. Launching Saturday night from this sequestered spa has become a Roger Norbrook tradition.

Retro-location used to leave me with a shaky feeling inside. It doesn't any more. Six successful pasttrips—this makes my seventh—have made me a veteran. I'll never forget my first time out, though. I didn't know then that the two ends of the induced photic loop—or warp—had joined at a spatially congenial materialization-point; I knew only that they had come together somewhere within a two or three mile radius of the apartment complex where my workshop is located and that the gravitational guidelines incorporated in the generating field had seen to it that the juncture was at ground level. I had to take a chance, and I did so. (While it's true that time and space are independent of each other—a fact that I demonstrated myself in a series of experiments at the Institute of TIMEstudy—there is nevertheless a slight lateral deviation in the former.)

(Roger Norbrook D: *B has never truly distinguished himself from A, not even during his pasttrips. By his very nature, he has always been blithely ignorant of the existence of C. C, of course, is keenly aware of both B and A. On occasion, A has sensed C's presence and identified him as a self-destructive urge; however, he has refused to take him seriously.*

(It need hardly be added that neither A nor B nor C has ever been aware of me.)

Roger Norbrook B: After entering the cafe, I walk over to the bar and sit down on a barstool next to an unescorted hausfrau. There's a fair crowd present and a handful of patrons in the dim-lit booths along the wall. The hausfrau has a vodka-and-orange sitting on the bar before her. I tell the bartender, whom I know by face, if not by name, from my previous visits, to bring me a Seagram's & 7.

I go easy on the first drink—it's too soon after breakfast to start tossing them off. That's the trouble with pasttrips (their only trouble as far as I'm concerned): they louse up your body's timetable. Tonight for some reason I feel even more loused up than usual. Not only that, I'm so tired my bones ache. Which is crazy. I know I didn't get much sleep, but I got some.

Oh well, after a few drinks I shan't know the difference.

I finish the first and am about to adjourn to another dive, as is my custom, for the second, when I perceive that the hausfrau sitting next to me is looking meaningfully in my direction. I have nothing against hausfrauen, especially when they're as readily available and as furry-soft as this one is, and I am delighted to have flushed quail so early in the hunt. I signal the bartender to bring me another Seagram's & 7.

The hausfrau keeps her left hand hidden behind her purse, apparently reluctant to reveal the tangible tokens of her connubial state. She laps her screwdriver like a big lissom cat. It's easily her tenth. Her name turns out to be Salome. I am shaken with silent laughter. Salome getting up early and fixing his breakfast; Salome dutifully mending his socks; Salome fetching his slippers like a big purring tabby when he comes home at night, tired and grumpy from his grueling grind at the office—

Salome, solo, lapping up screwdrivers in the Arabian Nights Café—

The outrageous *non sequitur* adds zest to my silent cynical laughter. But it turns out to be only technical: her dearly beloved's out of town. A *salesman* no less! Bless 'em, every one. Come, Salome, we will climb into your car and a-cabareting we will go! We'll wine and dine and dance, and afterward

we will screw. Tomorrow you can be served my head upon a platter if you wish, but tonight you shall serve me a rose!

Saturday, 9:57 P.M.; Roger Norbrook A:

In my aerie high above the motley city I make a final visual inspection of the warp-generating field to whose development I gave three precious years of my life and which has given me nothing but heartbreak in return.

The pulsing portal looks back at me enigmatically, half-blinding me with its infinitudinous scintillations.

Six Sunday mornings I have stepped through those self-deactivating photic panels, believing them to constitute a doorway to yesterday; six Sunday mornings, after an ephemeral sensation of falling, I have been tossed contemptuously into another part of the present, overwhelmed with inexplicable self-loathing; exhausted, debilitated, lost.

(Roger Norbrook D: A's grandfather blew his brains out at the age of thirty-eight. A's father despised sex with the fervor of an Essene, regarded the Eighteenth Amendment as an Act of God and its repeal as an Act of Satan. Both these bills of goods were rammed down A's throat daily till his father died of a coronary at the age of forty-two. Not long afterward, A and his mother took up residence in the apartment A now inhabits alone. He obtained his degree at the nearby University of R—, obtained a position at the Institute of TIMEstudy and settled down to a life of staid respectability. Throughout, he kept B imprisoned in a dark oubliette in the Gothic castle of the Norbrook unconscious. His mother died of uremia during his thirty-eighth year; soon afterward he began work on his time machine. It was not till after he perfected it and embarked on his first trip that B escaped from his oubliette. Naturally he behaved as he did—i.e., like a sex-starved, booze-bent sailor on shore leave—and naturally he continued to do so on each successive trip. Unlike C, however, B is not completely autonomous; nevertheless, the effect is the same as if the dissociation were total, for A, refusing to accept B's weekly escapes from the castle, blacks out all memory of the pasttrips. But he cannot, of course, black out the physical effects of B's debaucheries, nor the self-loathing accruing from his unconscious awareness of them.)

Roger Norbrook A: Tomorrow at exactly 9:00 A.M., I shall play the guinea pig again. I do not want to: it is as though I am compelled by some inner force.

As before, the nexus will be minus twelve hours. The field's potential is considerably greater, but it is unlikely that success will more readily crown my efforts if I try a longer loop. By the same token, it is unlikely that a shorter one will stand me in any better stead. (In either case, the nexus's original co-ordinates would remain approximately the same, but this can hardly be construed as a safety factor when the original co-ordinates are unknown to me.)

The synchronous clock on the workshop wall registers 10:07 P.M. I deactivate the field and turn tiredly toward the door. There is nothing more. I can do here. I have already done everything possible to ensure success. Success indeed! Dejectedly I leave the little room (originally it was a commodious closet), extinguishing the light and locking the door behind me. In the living room, I sit down in my fauteuil and resume watching TV.

I work the channel changer in vain: not one of the pallid programs gets past the threshold of my mind.

This is not because they are pallid. It is because my mind keeps masochistically reverting to my successive failures to achieve retro-location, to the scabrous locales to which I have been successively shunted instead. One time, to my horror, I found myself in bed with a strange and utterly naked woman, indubitably a harlot, in a section of the city I had never seen before; another time, I found myself lying in a filthy gutter, my clothes in abject ruin; still another time, I found myself pounding on the door of what subsequently turned out to be a Blind Pig. And the self-loathing! My God!—the self-loathing!

Of late, I have been the victim of depression—a depression so acute sometimes as to border on desperation. I would unhesitatingly ascribe its cause to my repeated failures to backtrack in time, but to a

certain extent I felt depressed before I began my experiments—for that matter, even before I conceived of a way in which light could be bent and time breached. Thus, while my failures have undoubtedly intensified my black broodings, they cannot be the sole cause.

Equally as distressing, I have of late been suffering from brief memory lapses. During one of them I purchased a handgun and a box of cartridges. I know I must have, although I haven't the slightest recollection of the transaction, because only yesterday I discovered the ugly weapon and the frightful little box in my filing cabinet. On another occasion I must have exhumed from somewhere a brown pinstripe suit I haven't worn for years: I know I must have, because I saw it just this morning hanging in the hall closet.

I become aware that my hands are trembling, that the electronic channel changer has slipped from my fingers and fallen to the floor. This will never do. Somehow I must get hold of myself and put to rout the monstrous shadow that keeps looking over my shoulder. I concentrate with all my mental might on the in-color but somehow colorless mini-world before me. At last I am rewarded: the meaning behind the seemingly pointless actions of the players gets through to me; I begin to catch on to the clichés that repeatedly pass their lips.

Relieved, I settle back in my fauteuil. Later in the evening, I will turn on an old movie and watch it till I am no longer able to stay awake. Then I will prepare myself a glass of warm milk and go to bed.

Saturday, 11:55 P.M.; Roger Norbrook B:

Flesh-satiated for the nonce, we lie in bed (His & Hers no less) and chat. No Seagrams & 7 now, nor vodka-and-orange; however, resourceful Salome has fetched a bottle of Burgundy from a kitchen-cupboard cache, so we do not want for wine. She has a teenager in highschool who's off to Aunt Jane's or Aunt Mame's and won't be back till Monday. Red wine. Her eleven-year old son's at Camp. Wine red. On the wall opposite our inner-spring Eden hangs a painting of a clown. Red wine, wine red. The face is seriocomic, multicolored, grotesque. A portrait of her cornuted husband? She laughs at my little joke; I join her. The two of us rock with laughter on the bed. More wine. Wine red, red wine, wine red, red. is the rose you gave me, my love, the red red rose I fondle reminiscently now as we lie here side by side in the roseate light of your bedlamp talking like two teenage lovers in the night. Red wine, wine red, red rose . . . I slaved for three long years, Salome, building the doorway that made this night and others like it possible; I slit the texture of light and sewed it back together again a hundred, a thousand times, and at last I found a way to make it bend; and I said, "Open sesame!"—and lo! the bright and blinding portal seemed to part, and I stepped through and plummeted into the past. Again and again and again. Seven—count them—times. And every time I go back, Salome, the trans-temporal forces my passage inadvertently sets free inadvertently set me free, rip asunder the puritanical strait-jacket I ordinarily wear to work and church and bed, acetylene the Victorian bars of my cold cruel cell till they melt into molten puddles at my feet; and I step forth reborn into the once-forbidden vineyard and gorge myself upon the saccharine grapes of life. Wine red, red wine, wine red.

Sunday, 12:07 A.M.; Roger Norbrook C:

I have a good view of the house (it is American Colonial Suburban) from the shadows of the high hedge behind which I slipped after the cab deposited me and drove off. The adjoining two-car garage had by that time already swallowed the woman's station wagon; the downstairs light that came on a few minutes later still burns. The light in the upstairs window that came on not long afterward also still burns. The latter is a wan light, rendered more so by drawn blinds.

My best bet, I think, will be to make my entry from the rear. But before trying any of the windows I'll try the back door. People are always hiding housekeys in the most ingenious—and most obvious—places: on porch ledges, in milk boxes, under doormats. However, I'll hold off for a while. By now he's probably recuperating from his co-operation in the evening's first beast-of-two-backs; it will be some time before he's up to the second. He's not young any more. After the second, if he remains true to form, he'll fall asleep. That should be around three o'clock. I'll wait till then.

Afterward I'll remove whatever items he has on his person that might lead to his immediate identification; then, on my way back to the apartment, I'll drop them into an ashcan or down a storm sewer. There will be a witness to the crime, of course, but it can't be helped. Hopefully, my quarry hasn't told his bedmate his full name.

There is a lawn chair lying on its side in the middle of the lawn. I drag it into the shadows and make myself comfortable. I touch the butt of the snub-nose .38 in my right-hand coat pocket. I yawn. There must be a pond somewhere in the neighborhood: I can hear the korak-korak of frogs.

Sunday, 1:10 A.M.; Roger Norbrook A:

The old movie I have been watching at last drags to a close. A clutch of 30-second commercials ensue.

I must get to bed. I have a hard day ahead of me tomorrow— A hard day's sleep.

For if the pattern repeats itself and at 9:00 A.M. I am re- rather than retro-located, I shall be as tired as though the opposite were true; and if it does not repeat itself and I am retro- rather than relocated, I shall probably be equally as fatigued.

There is a connection there somewhere (why should money be missing from my wallet every time I am shunted to another part of the present?) but I am unable to make it. Perhaps because the lateness of the hour has fogged my brain. Perhaps because the evening's cathodic fare has dulled it.

(Roger Norbrook D: The moral metamorphosis A undergoes each time he essays a pastrip is totally unrelated to the trans-temporal forces past-travel involves. He merely realizes each time he arrives in the past that officially he doesn't exist, that stretching before him are twelve hours of the purest freedom ever known to man. Pretentiousness, self-righteousness, self-deceit, fear—all fall away: he rips off his persona and becomes B.)

(Roger Norbrook A: I turn off the television set, go into the kitchen and prepare my glass of warm milk. I carry it into the bedroom, undress and remove my contact lenses. Once again, thoughts of my successive failures to achieve past travel assail me. Perhaps, after all, I erred in not conducting my experiments at the Institute, in not taking my associates into my confidence. The burden might not be so hard to bear if others shared it.

But *would* they share it?

Would they not instead, as I feared in the first place, shrug free of it and call me a fool behind my back? I, whose shoelaces they aren't fit to tie? I, who sit at home while they go out and guzzle gin? I, who sleep alone while they fornicate with one another's wives?

No, I was right in acting as I did. Noble endeavors deserve the services of noble men.

Sunday, 3:01 A.M.; Roger Norbrook B:

"Come, fill the Cup, Salome, and in the fire of Spring
Your Winter garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing!"

Sunday, 3:10 A.M.; Roger Norbrook C:

Aha! In the milk box, just as I thought.

Sunday, 3:23 A.M.; Roger Norbrook A:

Something has awakened me!

Someone .

I can feel his presence in the room.

No, not in the room. In myself.

The depression I took to bed with me has vanished. Hatred has taken its place. Hatred so cold and

inhuman it cannot even be classified as an emotion . . .

My God! what's happening to me? It's as though someone is taking over my thoughts, my mind, my body—lock, stock and

Roger Norbrook C:—and barrel. I turn on the bedlamp, get up, divest myself of his pajamas and don his underwear and socks. Ignoring his contact lenses, I leave the bedroom and go into the den.

I have prepared for my role well—

Sunday, 3:26 A.M.: Roger Norbrook B:

Our second time around, Salome concatenates. The clown looks down with sad and weary eyes. A Weltschmerz, his. He's monitored scenes like this before. My love is but a red dead rose . . .

The clown is in Poughkeepsie, Salome assures me. Far, far away. We doze off side by side. In what seems to be a post-coital dream I hear his footsteps on the carpeted stairs. Salome stirs beside me, turns and throws her smooth soft thigh across my stomach. There is a faint whisper, as of a door opening; aeons later there is a soft click! and the room is blasted with brightness. But it is not the clown who advances, pistol pointed, into the room. It's—it's—God!—no! It can't be! But why? *Why?*" Salome begins to scream. I try to scramble over her to the other side of the bed. There is a curious cracking sound and something heavy smashes against my left shoulder blade. There is a second, similar sound, a second numbing blow. I cannot move. The redness, the advancing blackness . . . Suddenly a light appears, grows brighter. O lovely light! O quiddity of Time: Time is Light, Light Time—that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know ...Go through the light, the light and the dark and the red wave rising, go through it to the other side go through the light!

... there, it's better here—I'll sleep ...

Sunday, 3:29 A.M.; Roger Norbrook C:

After entering the den, I put on the old-fashioned horn-rims I spotted yesterday in a cluttered desk drawer. Fortunately, there is only a minimum of difference between their prescription and that of his contact lenses.

Returning to the bedroom, I get a dress shirt out of the chest of drawers, and a brown tie. I put them on.

From the hall closet I take down the brown pinstripe I exhumed two days ago from a trunk in the dusty room that formerly belong to his beloved mother and that he now uses for storage. I put the suit on.

His everyday shoes will do.

Fully dressed, I re-enter the bedroom, where I transfer the contents of his pockets into mine. Afterward, I'll transfer everything back, return the suit to the closet and the horn-rims to the desk drawer. He will not remember my tenure no matter how many clues I leave behind, but for optimum results the game should he played according to the rules.

Returning to the den, I unlock the filing cabinet, remove the .38 I bought last week, load it and slip it into my right-hand coat pocket. I will replace both the gun and the unused shells (if any) after I finish my night's work.

From the den I proceed directly to the workshop, let myself in and lock the door. I flood the little room with fluorescence, set the retro-locator for 3:51 A. M. minus seven hours and activate the field. This will place my arrival in the past at a temporal point preceding my quarry's by about nine minutes. The photic warp, when it forms, will make whatever compensations that are necessary to keep the nexus spatially constant.

After turning out the light, I take up my position before the field. Presently the first photic particles appear. They multiply rapidly and a faint hum begins emanating from the energy converter.

I focus my gaze on the luminous face of the synchronous clock on the opposite wall.

I wait.

I am not in the least disturbed that I have not yet returned from my mission. Indeed, I would he

disturbed if I had, since I do not plan to come back to the apartment via orthodox travel till after I depart from it via the field. There may be a limit to the number of paradoxes Time can sustain over a given temporal period: one more might be one too many.

When I do return, I will replace the suit in the hall closet, the horn-rims in the desk drawer and the weapon and unused shells in the filing cabinet and then go directly back to bed. In the morning I shall awake as *him*. Only when he steps into the field will my mission be truly accomplished.

The clock on the wall registers 3:51. Unhesitatingly I embark upon my journey.

(Roger Norbrook D: The single-mindedness with which C planned and carried out the murder of B is misleading, because A—not B—was—is—his intended victim. But C, for all his coldbloodedness, was too squeamish to do the job directly, since it would have involved inserting the muzzle of the .38 into his mouth or placing it against his temple and pulling the trigger. Happily, the presence of a modern technological device provided him with a means of circumventing this unpleasantness. Thus, in one sense, Roger Norbrook's time machine can be classified as a sort of impersonal and highly humane self-executional apparatus analogous to the hangman's noose, the guillotine and the electric chair.

(It is interesting to speculate whether this may not have been his real motive for inventing it.)

Sunday, 8:25 A.M.; Roger Norbrook A:

I've overslept! I'll have to hurry!

It is imperative that I enter the field at exactly 9:00 A.M.

(Why is it imperative? And why am I so exhausted? And why am I so badly in need of a shave? No matter.)

I put coffee on to perk while I dress. The clock radio that failed to wake me earlier is talking earnestly to itself on the bed table. Something about a murder. I listen idly as I dress. Shortly before 3:30 A.M., Mrs. Alfred Hewett of 86 St. James Place was beset by two prowlers, the second of whom fatally shot and robbed the first, who, unquestionably a rapist, had managed to remove all his clothing and crawl into bed with her without awakening her. The police are skeptical about Mrs. Hewett's hysterical account. Thus far, they have been unable to identify the victim or to get a line on his accomplice/slayer, but—I do not catch the rest of the item because by this time I am in the bathroom operating my electric razor.

(Roger Norbrook D: C did not kill B. I did.

(Oh, the crime was committed by C's own hand—I do not mean that. But I could have averted it.

(Simply by destroying C.

(For that matter, I could have destroyed him long ago. But I didn't.

(Even now, I can void B's murder. Simply by denying C his target. All I have to do is supersede A and stop Roger Norbrook from entering the field. I can wipe the entire episode from the pages of Time.

(I can, but I won't.

(I want Roger Norbrook to enter the field.

(This multiple mud-hut of a man I have inhabited all my life, while atypical in certain respects, is probably no better or worse than the multiple mud-huts of my confreres. But to me it is a prison—as, perhaps, theirs are to them.

(I cannot depart from it soon enough.)

Roger Norbrook A: Returning to the kitchen, I drink my coffee as fast as its temperature will permit. I glance at the clock above the stove: 8:47.

I hurry to the workshop, unlock the door, enter and lock it behind me. I turn on the light and set the retro-locator for 9:00 A.M. minus twelve hours. I activate the field and go over and stand before it.

The first faint particles of light appear. 8:54.

I become aware that I am sweating. It is a cold, clammy sweat.

8:56. The humming of the energy converter fills the room. The photic portal has taken on the aspect of a scintillating waterfall. It seems to beckon to me.

8:58.

Anticipation effervesces deep within me. I would interpret it as a good omen had I not experienced the same false foretaste before.

9:00.

Pray God I do not fail again!

Roger Norbrook B:

Open sesame!

Roger Norbrook C:

Mission accomplished.

(*Roger Norbrook D:*

Why, if the Soul can fling the

Dust aside,

And naked on the Air of

Heaven ride,

Is't not a Shame—is't not a

Shame for him

So long in this Clay

Suburb to abide?)

Exeunt

—ROBERT F. YOUNG