



The Psilent Partner

Peterson, John Victor

Published: 1954

Categorie(s): Fiction, Science Fiction, Short Stories

Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/31735>

Also available on Feedbooks for Peterson:

- *Lost in the Future* (1954)

Copyright: Please read the legal notice included in this e-book and/or check the copyright status in your country.

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from Fantastic Universe March 1954. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

I

He had never cast his consciousness so far before. It floated high above New York, perceiving in the noonday sky the thin, faint crescent of a waning moon. He wondered if one day he might cast his mind even to the moon, knew with a mounting exultation that his powers were already great enough.

Yet he was as afraid to launch it on that awesome transit as he still was to send it delving into the tight subway tunnels in the rock of Manhattan. Phobias were too real now. Perhaps it would be different later... .

He was young, as a man, younger as a recognized developing psi. As his consciousness floated there above the bustling city, exultant, free, it sensed that back where his body lay a bell was ringing. And the bell meant it—his consciousness—must return now to that body... .

Dale V. Lawrence needed a lawyer urgently. Not that he hadn't a score of legal minds at his disposal; a corporation president must maintain a sizable legal staff. You can't build an industrial empire without treading on people's toes. And you need lawyers when you tread.

He sat behind his massive mahogany desk, a stocky, slightly-balding, stern-looking man of middle age who was psychosomatically creating another ulcer as he worried about the business transaction which he could not handle personally because of the ulcer operation he was about to have. Neither the business transaction nor the operation could be delayed.

He needed a particularly clever lawyer, one not connected with the corporation. Not that he had committed or that he contemplated committing a crime. But the eyes of the law and the minds of the psis of the government's Business Ethics Bureau were equally keen. Anyone in the business of commercially applied atomics was automatically and immediately investigated in any proposed transaction as soon as BEB had knowledge thereof. There was still the fear that someone somewhere might attempt, secretly, to build a war weapon again.

Lawrence had an idea, a great, burning, impossible-to-discard idea. Lawrence Applied Atomics, Inc., had been his first great idea—the idea that had made him a multi-millionaire. But through some devious financing he had lost control of the corporation. And although his ideas invariably realized millions, the other major stockholders were becoming cautious about risking their profits. Overly cautious, he thought. And on this new idea he knew they would never support him. They'd consider it a wild risk. He could blame BEB with its psis for that. BEB was too

inquisitive. A business man just couldn't take a decent gamble any longer.

The real estate firm in Los Angeles was secretly securing options from individual landowners. Fortunately the firm employed a psi, one of the few known psis not in government service. Lawrence had wondered why this psi was not working for the government, but decided the 'why' didn't matter if there were positive results.

Lawrence knew a little about psis. He knew, of course, what was commonly known—that they possessed wide and very varied talents, that they were categorized as plain psis, psi-espers, esper-psis, telepaths and other things. They weren't numerous; the Business Ethics Bureau which employed at least sixty percent of the known psis showed thirty on the payroll for this fiscal year.

Despite their rumored emotional instability, he knew that they were clever and he would steer clear of them in the present stages of his transaction. Although his idea wasn't unethical, the so far closely kept secret would be out if BEB investigated. Then anybody could cut in. BEB advertised whatever it did on its video show, "Your Developing Earth."

So, he needed a lawyer who could act for him personally, now, and steer his project clear of the government service psis. But where to find a psis... .

Of course! Bob Standskill! Standskill had helped him once years before when he had had that trouble with the Corporation Stock Control Board over a doubtful issue of securities he had floated to build Mojave City out of desert wastes. Without Standskill's techniques he never would have put that issue across. Standskill could handle this if anyone could.

Lawrence reached to the visiphone, punched the button sequence of Standskill's office number. The bell rang interminably before a rather bored young voice said, "Offices of Standskill and Rich, Attorneys-at-Law."

"I know," Lawrence said harshly. "I don't button wrong numbers. Is Standskill there? And where's your courtesy? There's no visual."

The picture came in then. Lawrence caught a flash of long, skinny legs going down behind the desk at the other end of the circuit; then he saw a most remarkable thing—the open collar of the young man's shirt seemed suddenly to button itself and the knot of the gaudy tie to tighten and all the while the fellow's hands were lying immobile on the desk!

Impossible! Lawrence thought. I'm cracking up! Too many worries about the psis ... I think I see them everywhere!

As the youth gulped as though the tie was knotted too tightly, Lawrence was sure that he saw the knot relax itself!

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Standskill's on vacation and Mr. Rich is in court. May I help you, sir, or take a message?"

Undoubtedly the fellow had recognized him from news fotos.

"Well, who are you, the office boy?"

A frown of annoyance crossed the young man's thin, dark features. He snapped, "Are corporation presidents exempt from common courtesy? My name is Black—Martin J. Black. I'm not connected with this firm. I answered as a courtesy. Shall we disconnect?"

Lawrence was silent for a moment. He thought of the shirt-tie business and said, "You're a trainee psi, aren't you? A prospective service psi?"

"I'm afraid so. I wish I weren't. It's not a pleasant prospect."

"What do you mean?"

"Would you like to probe minds for a living? And it has its other drawbacks. You can't live normally and you'll have very few friends. Unfortunately no two psis are alike, which makes the job more complicated. I'm un-normal, abnormal, subnormal or some other normal they haven't prefixed yet."

"Any special talents?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Rather young," Lawrence mused. Then said, "Are you economically stable?"

The young man hesitated, then said hastily, "Oh, yes, of course. Economically, yes. Somewhat more stable than most, I think. I'm in final training now. The legal phase comes last, you know."

"Then you're not committed yet? You've not taken the Oath of Anterhine?"

"No. I won't until the training is done. Wish I didn't have to then."

"And your training?"

"Complete except for criminal psychology."

"Would you like to make a hundred thousand dollars?"

Black said, "Your firm bought out Black Controlled Atomics, remember? That was my dad, and that was the end for him." He hesitated. "Let's say I'm vaguely interested. What's your proposition?"

Lawrence was silent for a moment. At length he said, "Being a psi your ultimate destiny is to aid in the development of the world whether you like to look forward to it or not. But would you not like to see desert areas developed through applied atomics as Mojave City, Sanup Plateau City and Quijotoa City were?"

"Certainly," Black said quickly. "It's in my blood. The old man did well at such developments; in fact, he started Quijotoa. Sometimes I wish Standskill hadn't liquidated our estate, but my mother's will made it mandatory."

"How much do you know about Standskill's techniques?"

"I'm a psi," Black said. "I can find out anything I want to know."

"Where *is* Standskill?"

"Paris. His first vacation in years. Going to be away quite a while."

"Will you come to my office?"

"Why?"

"I'd like to discuss a business proposition."

"What's wrong with doing it over the visiphone?"

"This is confidential," Lawrence said.

"Something not exactly legal?" Black asked. "Big deal, eh? The Control Board again—oh, oh! You'd better see Standskill!"

Lawrence felt uneasy. "Are you—are you reading my mind?" he stammered.

"Sorry," the young man said, smiling faintly. "It's easier that way. I dislike physical movement on such warm days as this. And it's easier for me to pick up your proposal this way than to go through that beastly traffic."

"Then you know?"

"Certainly. I'm a psi so I can read your mind."

"Do you accept the job?"

"Well, people in that area and the country in general would certainly benefit from the development. I don't know about that lawyer from Los Angeles though. They teach us in Service Psi School that non-service psis are not to be trusted. In fact, service psis are forbidden to associate with non-service psis. They're considered unethical."

"You're not in service yet, Black, and you must realize that the psi-ethics as taught in your school are much more strict than business ethics. If Standskill were here he'd certainly help me, and you know he has a fine code of ethics. It's desperate, Black. I need your services urgently. Won't you please accept the job?"

"I suppose so," the young man said wearily, resignedly. "Standskill would agree, I'm sure. But, as a trainee, I'm not supposed to meddle in business transactions. However, I'd hate to see you lose out on this because I know Standskill would unhesitatingly help you if he were here. Also, I'm curious to meet that psi from Los Angeles." His sharp chin

grew resolute. "I'll try, Mr. Lawrence. And my conscience will be clear; I haven't yet taken the Oath."

"Will you need anything—any physical help, any tangible thing?"

"I'll need your power-of-attorney."

"You'll have it before I go to the hospital."

"And, Mr. Lawrence," Black said softly. "About the surgery—don't worry, you'll be okay. It's chiefly psychosomatic, you know. In a couple of weeks you'll be fine. You couldn't have picked a better doctor than Summers."

Lawrence felt better already, a result of his talk with this brash young man.

"Thank you, Black," he said. "Thank you very much. But, look—as a psi, can you assure me that my idea is not slightly lunatic? I've begun to doubt that it will work."

Lunatic... . Mentally unsound... . Luna... . Moon... . The crescent of the moon in the noonday sky. Yes, he could go now... . The transit was brief... . No! He must go back, must bear the consciousness that was Martin Black back from this airless, cratered sphere! Panic seized him. He fled.

Lawrence was astounded to see the young man at the other end of the visiphone seemingly fall into a deep sleep, his head down suddenly on the desk.

"Black," he cried, "are you all right? Shall I send a doctor to—"

"No!"

The young man raised his head. "I'm quite all right, Mr. Lawrence, though slightly exhausted. Didn't sleep well last night. Sorry! I'll ring you after I contact Dick Joyce."

"No names, please," Lawrence said. "I go into the hospital this afternoon, Black. You'd better not contact me there. The doctor said no business while I'm there. From now on you're on your own."

Your own! He was drifting! He fought it... .

"Right, Mr. Lawrence. Goodbye!"

II

Martin Black *was* tired. His consciousness had almost drifted off to home again, back to that old mansion on the Hudson River which Standskill had sold as directed under Black's mother's will. The old house in which he was born, where he had first found that he could sit in his room and send his consciousness questing down the hall to meet his father when he came home, pry into what his father had brought for him and surprise his parents later by invariably guessing correctly.

Sometimes now he wished that he hadn't "guessed" correctly so often in those days. Then his uncle Ralph wouldn't have mentioned his unusual ability to the Business Ethics Bureau and the psis wouldn't have investigated him. Once they found that he had such mental qualifications he had been sent to the Service Psi School, a virtual prison despite his family's social status.

Anger suddenly choked him at the thought of what his uncle Ralph had brought upon him. The psi training had been so rigid, so harsh at times.

Well, of course they have to be sure that psis develop into useful members of society. But couldn't they treat you more normally, more humanly?

Now, perhaps he'd show them, repay them for the cruel years of a lonely, bitter youth. He hadn't taken the Oath yet, and if he were clever enough he'd never have to! The real estate lawyer in Los Angeles with whom Lawrence was making a deal had evaded service somehow, apparently. So it was possible.

He had learned long ago that money wouldn't buy him out of service. He'd tried also to purchase certain liberties at school. Some of the less scrupulous teachers had taken his allowance, but only one of them had ever given him anything in return. And of course he couldn't protest when he had violated Ethics to give the bribes. In any event, no one would take the word of an untrained psi over the word of a stable, normal human being.

During the stabilization course one professor had permitted him to skip some classes. Now he wished that he hadn't missed them; he probably wouldn't have this semantic instability to contend with now. Oh, well... .

He *was* tired. He'd spent the previous night, or most of it, worrying about the miserable state of his finances. He needed money, a lot of money. But he wouldn't, of course, admit that to Lawrence.

Lawrence would have understood why he needed money—even more than the hundred thousand he had offered. But then Lawrence might mistrust his motives in accepting the proposal so readily if he knew.

A year before Black had invested too much of his own money in a "sure thing" upon the advice of a fellow psi trainee who, he subsequently and sadly found out, had *economic* instability. Semantic instability was bad enough!

Not that Martin Black didn't have a hundred thousand dollars. He was, indeed, a rather wealthy young man, thanks to his mother who had been, to her son's knowledge—and to his alone—a psi with definite powers of pre-vision and persuasion.

He recalled the tale Mom had told him of her first meeting with Dad, of how she'd lingered over Dad's well groomed nails three times longer than desire for a good tip made necessary, while she'd gently insinuated into his mind an idea that was next day translated into action on the stock market, with a modest investment from a modest purse that brought the young man a small fortune. After the wedding Martha Black dedicated herself to further improvements in the same direction.

As for Martin's father, his chief business assets had been an unswerving adoration of his wife and complete willingness to do with his money as she saw fit. The combination had been unbeatable.

When Martin's father was laid to rest, Martha Black, concerned over the future of her somewhat unusual son and fearing that economic instability might beset him, continued to improve the fortune he would some day inherit.

Long before the death of his mother five years before, Black Controlled Atomics, Inc., had grown sufficiently important to command the services of a lawyer of Standskill's caliber. Gradually Standskill had become general counsel to the Black enterprises and at the same time a close friend of Martha Black and her son.

It was chiefly in the latter capacity that the widow consulted Standskill as she approached the end of her life. Her Last Will and Testament, duly signed, sealed, published and declared, left one-half of the immediately-to-be-liquidated estate to her son outright. The other half was put in trust.

Under the trust Martin was to receive the income until he was thirty. If then an audit showed that his net worth, exclusive of the trust, had increased by thirty percent the trust was to end and Martin was to receive the principal. If not, the trust would end and the full amount thereof would go to his uncle Ralph, a prospect which caused Martin completely

to lose his stability whenever he allowed himself to think of it. He just *had* to make the thirty percent!

R. W. Standskill was trustee, and the will gave him full power to invest the trust estate as he saw fit and without liability if his investments went bad and without any bond or security required of him whatsoever. More in token of appreciation of his services than anything else, Standskill was to receive one percent of the trust as long as he was trustee.

Martin Black's mind dwelled on the thought of the thirty percent increase. After five years of conservative investing he had taken some bad advice in the past year. And now he had to make some money fast in order to catch up to the quota which was necessary if he were to achieve his goal.

The Lawrence deal would give him his chance. But not if Standskill knew about it. The Lawrence deal seemed a good thing, but perhaps it was only a *sure* thing if he kept to himself, for the time being at least.

He was so tired... . *Fatigué*. The French for tired. Funny, he did remember some of the French from school. Standskill was in Paris. Association. *Fatigué*. The word stuck. That club—Bob Standskill's favorite—*Le Cheval Fatigué* in Montmartre. The Tired Horse. Tired... .

Sleep closed in... . He drifted ... and came to with a sudden start as a hand roughly shook his shoulder. It seemed as though he had been hovering mentally in a dimly-lighted cellar cafe, where there was a babel of voices speaking continental languages, and Standskill was there.

But, *no!* he couldn't have been in Paris any more than he had been on the meteor-pounded wastes of the moon! It was ridiculous. As far as he knew, no psi had ever been known consciously to flit to the moon—or unconsciously, for that matter—or to the other side of an ocean!

Standskill's partner, G. D. Rich, was shaking his shoulder. "What's the matter, Marty? Big night?"

"Big day," Black said. "Why don't you fellows stick around and take care of your business? I'm not even supposed to answer the telephone, you know, but someone has to!"

"Can I help it that the Legal Secretaries Guild has called a three-day convention? There's not a secretary present in any law office in New York right now! I personally cut the phone in to the answering service before I left for court."

"Inadvertence, I guess," Black said thoughtfully.

"Inadvertence?" Rich said quickly.

"Mine. I must have cut it back."

He didn't tell Rich that he hadn't stirred from the desk since Rich had left. The switch was in the outer office. Had he with his consciousness floating high over New York sensed subconsciously that Lawrence was about to call and so cut in the switch? Had he built into himself something of the pattern of his mother, something of pre-vision or prescience, or call it what you will? Was a latent hunch power coming out in him now, something that would manifest itself by acts not consciously controlled? He hoped not! Semantic instability was bad enough!

III

Sleep evaded Martin Black again that night... . There was no doubt that Lawrence had a great idea.

Lawrence held forty-five percent of the company's stock. He wanted control. In fact, he wanted outright ownership, but this was not possible because the other major stockholders, holding forty-five percent, seemed to be perfectly satisfied with their lucrative investment. Cautious inquiries had failed to disclose any inclination on their respective parts to sell.

There were, however, enough independent shares outstanding to give Lawrence control if they were added to his own. The thing to do was to figure a way to buy them. The problem was that no matter how secret his operations, news or rumors of them would certainly leak out. The shares would then undoubtedly jump to outrageous highs. Lawrence couldn't risk that. He'd not be able to buy sufficient shares if the price rose.

His corporation had completed Quijotoa City and had built Mojave City and Sanup Plateau City, had through applied atomics created verdant and lovely places out of wasteland and desert. It still owned the atomic piles that provided power for the cities and the profits therefrom were enormous.

Lawrence was progressive. He was at heart a humanitarian. He wanted to develop other areas more from the humanitarian view than the profit motive. He had learned long ago that the profits would take care of themselves.

In probing the man's mind, Black sensed Lawrence's great desire for adulation, his great desire to be remembered as a public benefactor.

Now if only he, Martin J. Black, could benefit financially from this new deal—if he could corner enough of those independent shares, he could and certainly would vote them Lawrence's way. Then, perhaps the possibility of making the thirty percent he needed would approach probability, would reach it. With Lawrence's Midas touch the corporation would also realize millions in profits if the deal went through.

Figures revolved in Black's mind. If Lawrence—or if he—could corner six percent of the stock... . Could some of the independents be persuaded to sell, *psionically persuaded*? Or one of the other major stockholders? No, that would be unethical and the strongest part of a psi's training was a fine code of ethics.

Black began to doze—and felt something ever so softly probing at his mind. *A probe!* Probably a service psi checking on him. *Why?* Just the usual check? No, it wasn't due.

He knew what to do. He had been probed before. Probing was part of the training at psi school but he had never revealed—and his tutors had never guessed—that he could create a block that could not be sensed by the prober. A block which could close off whatever thoughts he wished to conceal.

He blocked his thoughts of Lawrence and the deal now, and opened freely that part of his mind which held the routine thoughts of the law offices. He felt that feather of thought brushing lightly through his brain, then it was gone as quickly as it had come.

There was a cold sweat over him but he knew that he had passed the test. Why the probe? Perhaps a BEB psi had wind of Lawrence's deal and by probing Lawrence's mind—or the mind of someone in the West Coast realty outfit—had somehow learned of Black's association with the industrialist. If that were the case there would be more probes. One time or another a probe might come at a moment of nervous tension or stress and the information would be gleaned from his mind before he could block!

He must work fast.

He arose and went to the visiphone, placed a person-to-person call to Los Angeles.

"Dick Joyce?" he asked before the visual contact was complete, and only his voice went out.

The face that came in sync on the screen was round, jovial. "Well, hello, Marty!"

Lawrence must have called him, or else he plucked the name from my mind. But he didn't probe—or did he?

"Dick, do you register?" *With the mind now—cautiously!*

"Yes, Marty."

Pretend you're my personal friend, Dick. There's no psi on us but we may be wiretapped by BEB—lots of law offices are and trainees connected with them. Can a definite date be set for the picking-up of the options?

"It's good to see you again, Marty! When will you be coming out for another visit?" *Yes, the options are in the bag. My agents have them all lined up. Confidentially, they couldn't miss. The only trouble they ran into was that some of the landowners thought they were insane to be interested in the property and one of them actually suffered a sprained wrist from the hand-shaking of an overly thankful owner.*

"Soon. That's why I called you. Thought we should get together after all these years." *What's the latest date for signing?*

Tomorrow night.

Tomorrow night! That doesn't give much time! Since I'm acting for Lawrence I have to see what we're getting.

Well, Lawrence told us to work fast. But I agree that it's a good idea that you see the properties. "How about this weekend?" His voice was casual.

Tomorrow evening local time it is then. But where will we make psi-contact?

A mental picture of a map. Desolation... . Oklahoma... .

"Okay, Dick. See you then. Regards to the family!"

"Goodbye, Marty."

He rang off.

He was tired. He went to bed and sought sleep, praying that the block his fatigued mind had set would remain firm.

IV

Martin Black passed a very bad night. Maintaining a mental block when asleep is a major feat, especially when one has semantic instability and a dream can so often be so realistic as to bring one's consciousness awake and mentally screaming miles from the physical being it has involuntarily left.

He dreamed with incredible regularity, waking five times out of nightmares, five times strangely on the hour as though he had tied some part of his mental being to the irresistibly moving, luminescent minute hand of his electric clock. *Time is of the essence*, he had told himself during the psi-visiphone contact with Joyce. *Association!*

Two a.m. He had dreamt of Joyce, dreamt that Joyce had somehow revealed the proposed transaction to BEB, putting Dodson on his trail. Wide awake now, he forced himself to think of the options which must be picked up the following night, options drawn so that not only the landowners must sign them but both the realty outfit and he, as Lawrence's attorney-in-fact, as well. Could he sign for Lawrence if Joyce had spilled?... No, it was only a dream. Joyce was so *very* stable!

Three a.m. He had dreamt of Standskill, tall, lean Standskill striding through the lovely early morning along the Champs Élysées, moving purposefully. He had even dreamt he had for a moment invaded Standskill's mind and caught the lawyer's pounding thought, "Lawrence! *Buy*, Lawrence!" Oh, but that would never do. The service psis would catch Standskill, would test the ethics of it now that Joyce had spilled, would cause Standskill to be disbarred. But Standskill didn't know! A dream. *A lunatic dream.*

Four a.m. The coincidence of the timing of his wakings struck him then. For a moment the latest dream eluded him and then the sense of airless cold, a bleak, cratered landscape, stark stars staring in a lunar night swept coldly across his mind. He shivered, drew the blanket over him, thought: *How many shares? Six thousand? I can do it. I'll contact the broker in the morning. Six thousand at two hundred per. One million two hundred thousand dollars.*

But that would raise the price, the attempt to buy so many shares. You can't buy a million plus in one stock without driving the price up—*unless you manage to buy all the shares at once!* If only he could persuade—psionically persuade—but he couldn't! It wasn't ethical.

His mind drifted... . I'll call the broker in the morning. Perhaps he can start picking up some of the independent shares when the market opens.

If only he could snag the four thousand that—what was that name in Lawrence's mind?—yes, Redgrave! The four thousand that Redgrave has! That would be a start!

Redgrave had always fought Lawrence tooth and nail. Lawrence would derive vast personal satisfaction from seeing Redgrave an *ex*-stockholder. Thankless cad! Investment in the corporation had helped make Redgrave a very wealthy man. Lawrence stock was only part of his vast holdings. Redgrave was definitely out of the red!

Black chuckled, then told himself that this was a grave and not a laughing matter. Sleep was coming again... *. Out of the red. Grave. Redgrave!*

Five a.m. He awoke in a cold sweat... This time the dream came back slowly, drenching him with fear as it came. It was sheer madness, this dream! To have even considered investing in Lawrence Applied Atom-ics! The Government would never condone the deal Lawrence was contemplating—the Applied Atomics Corporation was nearly insolvent, the BEB psis were investigating it... .

Black tossed fitfully on the bed, seeking sleep desperately, seeking to escape the black night pressing in, to evade the imagined—or was it real?—probing minds of service psis.

Six a.m. He almost forgot the fears that had assailed him an hour before. He realized then that in the last few minutes or seconds or however long the latest transient phantasm had been in his mind he had dreamt of his broker pacing a dimly-lighted chamber, muttering, "The man's out of his mind. Economic instability, that's certain. Thinking of selling good stock to invest in Lawrence Applied Atomics! Not that Lawrence stock isn't fairly good, but he'll never make enough out of the corporation's piles; the returns are not that great!"

8 a.m. Black stretched, felt strangely relaxed. He realized then that as he had slept and, despite the fitfulness of his sleeping, his mind had apparently gone on analyzing the possible reactions to the big deal.

He arose, took a shower, shaved, ate breakfast. Then he went to the vi-siphone and buttoned Charles Wythe, his broker, at his office.

"Charlie," Black said to the cadaverous looking man who answered. "Where's the boss?"

"Went to see a psychiatrist."

"Why?"

"I don't know. What's on your mind?"

"I want you to do some selling and buying for me. Sell whatever you like, but buy Lawrence Applied Atomics."

"Look, Marty, let's not go off half-cocked. Last year you had a sudden brainstorm and remember what happened. Lawrence may be a good stock, but it won't help you to build up to that thirty percent you need. Not in the time you have to do it in. It's bad enough for you to take a big licking once. Let's not be stupid again."

"Now, Charlie, don't be nasty. I want you to buy Lawrence as quietly as you can. I want six thousand shares at the current price. Get them for me."

"Are you shaken loose from your psyche or id or whatever?" Wythe cried. "Do it quietly, the man says, do it quietly! You can do it about as quietly as they launched the space station. Where do you think I can get six thousand shares of Lawrence?"

"Why, you buy them!" Black answered innocently. "Isn't that what you do down at the Stock Exchange?"

The broker groaned. "Sure, that's all I do. Buy, that is. But not Lawrence. Look, Marty, see this chart? Yesterday was a big day for Lawrence Applied Atomics. It was unusually active. Three hundred shares changed hands. The day before it was one hundred. Once in my memory Lawrence had a four thousand share day. That must have been when Redgrave bought in. Now you tell me how I'm going to get you six thousand shares, get them quietly, and get them at the current price!"

"Start buying," Black said, "because I've got a hunch you'll find them. My mother had hunches, didn't she? Did she ever tell you or the boss to buy the wrong stocks? Did she—"

"That was your mother, Marty. What about that hunch you had last year, the one that cost you a couple of hundred thou—"

"That was last year!"

"So, what's changed?" asked Wythe.

"Maybe *I've* changed, Charlie. Do it; that's all I ask."

"Okay, Marty. But I think you're out of your mind, especially with what was on the morning news."

"And what was that?"

"Lawrence is in bad shape. He's not likely to pull through. They operated last night, in case you didn't know."

"But that should drive the stock down!"

"Why? It won't affect the profits from the corporation's piles."

"No. I agree. But that's not the only thing that keeps the price up. What about Lawrence's reputation?"

"Well, there's also a rumor about a government investigation of the corporation," Wythe admitted. "That might have some downward effect."

"Buy, Charlie, buy! I'll ring you later."

Black rang off. He felt an overwhelming confidence. He had only one small doubt in his mind—during or following one of those disturbing dreams had he been sufficiently overwrought to have relaxed his mental block, thereby letting in a fleeting probe from a service psi who would then have gleaned, in a moment, knowledge of the proposed transaction?

The unease waned. The exuberant confidence was in him again. The prescience of Martha Black?

He went out and caught a heli-cab to the law offices. He'd be a good trainee to the eyes and minds of anyone who might check. If the service psis were on his trail, he'd show them how good a trainee he was. He could check with Charlie Wythe later.

V

At ten a.m., Standskill's partner, G. D. Rich left the office to attend court.

At ten-thirty a.m., a contact call came whispering to Black's mind. He thought it at first a probe and blocked part of his mind; then relaxed as it realized it was a psi asking with overbearing politeness for him to connect the visiphone circuit. The mental touch seemed somehow familiar, but it wasn't Joyce. He knew it wasn't Joyce; there was something unsure and tentative about the whisper of thought.

Black psionically cut in the outer office visiphone connection. The bell rang almost immediately. He switched on the inner office instrument and a familiar face came in sync on the screen—that of Peter Dodson, the principal administrative officer of the BEB psis.

Dodson's blondly handsome face showed concern. He said, "I wanted visiphone contact, Black, because of an unfavorable report I've received on you. I'll get to that in a minute. First, I'd like to explain the background. As you may have learned from the news this morning, we're investigating Lawrence Applied Atomics because of a tip we'd received from Los Angeles that Lawrence is engaged in a venture which will eventually affect corporation funds without proper advance authorization.

"Finding that Lawrence had some dealings with Standskill in the past, we thought that Standskill might be able to shed some light on the new venture. When we were unable to contact Standskill, we sought to contact you psionically last night, but found that your mind was a completely unreadable jumble of nightmares, filled with phobias and instabilities. We stopped probing then, realizing that you might be seriously ill."

Apparently visual examination had convinced Dodson that Black wasn't as ill as had been thought. Black felt the feather touch of a probe coming now and he blocked, his thin face expressionless.

"I did have a rather bad night," Black said. "Association. Semantic instability." He felt the tentacle of thought that was sweeping across his mind.

"Well," Dodson said, his eyes probing from the screen, "it's obvious *you* know nothing of the Lawrence deal. Strange, though, since there's a record of a call placed to that office by Lawrence yesterday, and as far as we have been able to determine only you were there and only you could have answered. How do you explain that?"

Easy now! The block is most difficult to maintain when you're lying. Easy... .

"There was a call," Black admitted, "from someone I don't know, a fellow who wanted Standskill. Wouldn't say why or give his name. The moment I told him Standskill was in Paris he said with some reluctance that he would have to contact another law firm. The caller was probably Lawrence. If you could describe him—"

"So Standskill's in Paris! The answering service didn't know that. Well, that rules him out. Thank you, Black. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Rather tired," Black said. "Overwork, I expect. The training is rather strenuous, and I do wish you wouldn't probe. As you found in psi school, my powers have a very delicate balance."

The probe withdrew hastily.

"Sorry, Black. Very sorry. Perhaps you need a rest. I'll be only too glad to send through an order—"

"Oh, thank you, sir," Black said, trying to make it sound fervent and properly subservient. He sent a thought of thankfulness after his words, a weak one. He must not appear too strong.

Dodson rang off.

The coast was clear! They would not probe again soon!

Black immediately called Charles Wythe, found his broker's cadaverous face puzzled.

"Marty, the market's crazy! I managed to pick up four thousand shares within ten minutes after the market opened. One purchase. The broker from whom I obtained them represented Dan Redgrave—"

"Redgrave!" Black almost shouted.

"Yes, Redgrave. He said Redgrave is plain cuckoo. Ordered him to sell at one hundred fifty. Said he'd bought them at that and would sell them at that. No profit wanted. Glad to get out in time to recoup his original investment. What's cuckoo about it is that, except for the momentary flurry when we picked up the Redgrave shares, the stock has been rising all morning. It's up to two twenty-five as of this moment.

"Lawrence must have someone else buying regardless of the price. Three concerns are still trying to buy at the present price. Ethics forbids me to ask who their clients are. Not that they'd tell me anyway! Now, look, Marty, do you want me to buy at that price, if I can, that is?"

"Well, I must have six thousand, unless Lawrence is buying and I'm quite sure he isn't. See if you can find out who the buyer is, won't you?"

"Everybody's crazy today," the broker said. "I'll call you back."

Wythe did, a few minutes later.

"I'm afraid it's no use, Marty. There's not another share to be had. There's been news from the hospital. Lawrence has rallied. Although he's still in a coma, his chances are good for recovery. Not only that, but the Business Ethics Bureau has issued a statement to the effect that the tip they'd received about Lawrence and a deal has not been proved to have a foundation in fact. Those things have put the stock way up. Everybody wants to buy Lawrence but nobody wants to sell—except me! Let's sell, Marty!"

"Not on your life," Black said decisively. "And, look, we *must* get two thousand more shares! Get them, Charlie!"

He clicked off again.

So Dan Redgrave had sold at a ridiculously low price! Had his consciousness wandered in those dreams? Had he psionically persuaded Redgrave to sell? That wouldn't be ethical. But do ethics apply to *involuntary* acts?

His mind was in turmoil. He dared not exercise his psi powers again just now. He feared above all the wrath of Dodson and the other service psis. If they came to suspect that he had persuaded Redgrave—that he had, according to Ethics, misused his powers ... he knew only too well that there are ways of banishing psi powers, insulin shock and other treatments.

And for all his present aloneness he was beginning to realize his latent powers—powers which, when fully developed, would doubtlessly bring him into contact with others like himself, with someone who could share the fierce ecstasy of probing with the consciousness to the moon, or even farther, at the speed of light at which thought moved. No, perhaps he need not always be alone... .

He went out to lunch, returned, called his broker. Wythe told him there was no activity in Lawrence. The afternoon wore. A few minutes before the exchange closed the broker called.

"It's hopeless, Marty," said Wythe. "Let's sell. The price is still two twenty-five and nothing for sale. How about it? Three hundred thousand profit in one day."

It sounded attractive. Black hesitated, then thought of Lawrence, good, old would-be humanitarian and philanthropist D. V. Lawrence lying in coma. Lawrence, whose dreams were in his hands now. He had come to like Lawrence, the trail-blazer where there were so few trails to be blazed. He had to help him. If worse came to worse he would cast Ethics to the winds. He'd have to! His conscience couldn't permit him to do

anything else. He would psionically persuade at least one of the other stockholders to vote Lawrence's way.

Well, at least his mind was made up. Lawrence would have his options. And with forty-nine percent of the stock between them they could gamble on getting a favorable vote.

"What about it, Marty?" the broker asked impatiently.

"Sorry," Black said. "The answer is no, Charlie! I want that stock."

He rang off.

Moments later his consciousness was on its way to keep the rendezvous with Joyce high in the evening sky over Oklahoma, up where the blue of the atmosphere turned to the black of infinity.

And moments later lights blazed over a table in a realty office in Los Angeles where no one sat. But pens lifted and wrote... .

"D. V. Lawrence by Martin J. Black, his attorney-in-fact."

"J. F. Cadigan Realty Corporation by Richard Joyce, Vice-President."

Another pen lifted with the invisible but delicate twist of a feminine psi-touch.

"Before me this ninth day of September in the year Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-six Anno Domini psionically appeared... ."

The options were psigned, come what may!

VI

An oak-panelled conference room. Lawrence's first vice-president reading the proposal. The board of directors. The major stockholders. Smaller ones. Attorneys-in-fact for both Lawrence and Black.

And *Bob Standskill*!

What was Standskill doing here?

But the first vice-president had finished reading the proposal and was asking for a vote.

Lawrence—forty-five thousand shares—*yes*!

Maryk—twenty thousand shares—*no*!

Carrese—nine thousand shares—*no*!

Tonemont—seven thousand shares—*no*!

Black—four thousand shares—*yes*!

Turitz—five thousand shares—*no*!

And the smaller stockholders, one by one—*no, no, no*!

Forty-nine thousand shares—*no*! Forty-nine thousand shares—*yes*!

Black felt ill. His hovering consciousness almost fled from its invisible vantage point above the conference table back to the mansion on Riverside Drive, back where the memories of Martha Black remained... . But it wavered, stabilized... .

Standskill rising, so implacable, so sure and saying, "Two thousand shares—*yes*!"

Black probed Standskill's mind almost involuntarily then, realizing instantly that he should have disregarded Ethics and probed before. Standskill was a psi, a *non-service psi*! And Black knew then that when his consciousness had flitted through association to *Le Cheval Fatigué* in Montmartre, Paris, and had fixed there for a brief unstable moment it had yielded to Standskill all knowledge of the Lawrence deal, persuading Standskill to order his brokers to buy the corporation's stock for the trust... .

Black's consciousness sped to join Joyce's in a law office in Oklahoma. It watched the landowners signing the deeds even as it signed psionically the checks which represented the good and valuable considerations.

The deal was closed.

VII

Joyce, tell me—did you, to your knowledge, tip off the BEB psis?

Yes. Inadvertently, of course. I had a nightmare. I'm afraid I'm sometimes unstable, anonymously so, when asleep. Only then, though, thank Heaven!

And, Joyce, why aren't you in service?

For the same reason you can't be.

Confusion.

What do you mean?

Your mother knew.

My mother?

Yes, Marty, don't you realize that only unstable psis are taken into service? Stability is the mark of the superman. Do the majority of men want the minority—the supermen—running their world even though the supermen are their brothers, sisters and children? And they must surely realize that all mankind will evolve to psis one day. Marty, you were in psi school. So was I. Did you complete Stabilization?... I see you didn't. No psi does! They let you think you're getting away with something when you skip classes, but you're not!

Fortunately, if you are strong enough, you stabilize on your own. Perhaps you'll realize now that your mother gave you the incentive: the thirty percent angle, realizing that an uncle you definitely did not like would inherit if you didn't strive to the utmost. It worked.

They can't touch me, Marty, and they can't touch you! We can elude them mentally and physically. They know they can't touch us; so they just have to tolerate us! I can read in your mind that you've stabilized. You can fit physically now. Why don't you try? Lawrence is waiting...

Black's consciousness sped back to his body. His body lifted and sped to a hospital room.

Lawrence was awake. He viewed Black's materialization with incredulity.

"The deal is closed," Black said.

"But—you—" Lawrence stammered. "Closed?"

"Yes. And, considering the shares I hold, I guess that makes me something of a psilent partner of yours!"

A brash young man, Lawrence thought. A very brash young man!

Black grinned. *Thirty percent? He couldn't miss!*

They shook hands.

It was a deal. Psigned, sealed and delivered!

Loved this book ?
Similar users also downloaded

Dan T. Moore

The Double Spy

Meet the man with no name. Nothing cool about this cat. He was built along the lines of a necktie rack, weighed slightly more than a used napkin, and was as shy as the ante in a crooked poker game. No sex appeal there, you'd say. Yet within the space of a few days every woman in the country melted into quivering protoplasm at the very thought of this mystery man!

Alfred Coppel

The Peacemaker

The legends of Jaq Merrill are legion—but legends. Hark, ye, then to the true story of the pirate benefactor of Mankind!

Vern Fearing

The Sloths of Kruvny

This world we live in is a pretty grim place. It's tough to make a living. At any moment we may get blown up, down or sideways by the atom bomb. The day after tomorrow may never come, and on top of all this, TV commercials are getting worse and worse. It seems that our only salvation is a sense of humor, so we give you "The Sloths ..." a very unserious yarn.

Robert Andrew Arthur

Ring Once for Death

The power of the old gods was certainly nothing for Mark and Edith—a modern, twentieth-century couple—to worry about. After all—everybody dies!

Horace Brown Fyfe

The Wedge

Finding his way out of this maze was only half the job.

Jerome Bixby

The Draw

Stories of the old West were filled with bad men who lived by the speed of their gun hand. Well, meet Buck Tarrant, who could out-draw them all. His secret: he didn't even have to reach for his weapon....

Robert Joseph Shea

Star Performer

Blue Boy's rating was high and his fans were loyal to the death—anyone's death!

Katherine Anne MacLean

Games

It is a tough assignment for a child to know where a daydream ends and impossibility begins!

James McKimmey

'Mid Pleasures and Palaces

It was, Kirk thought, like standing in a gully, watching a boulder teeter precariously above you. It might fall at any minute, crushing your life out instantly beneath its weight. Your only possible defenses are your brain and voice—but how do you argue with a boulder which neither sees nor hears?

Floyd L. Wallace

Student Body

When a really infallible scientific bureau makes a drastically serious error, the data must be wrong ... but wrong in what way?



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind