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Oct.  
1954

The Reprint Magazine

Issued as a supplement to  
HYPHEN # 11 by Walt Willis,  
170 Upper Newtownards Rd,  
Belfast, Northern Ireland.  
THIS ISSUE EDITED BY  
CHUCK HARRIS

BABY IS FIFTY.

by GREGG CALKINS  
(From The Rambling Fap! #2. FAPA Mailing 66)

I walked into his office and stood there, waiting. "Sit down over there in that chair, skinny," he said absently.

I got mad. "Look," I said, "if a man who'd recently been scalped by an Indian walked in here, would you say 'sit down in that chair, red'?" He looked up at me, puzzled. "I can't help it if I'm 6'3" and weigh 105 lbs," I said.

He nodded. "I understand. Lay down over there on that couch, skinny."

I threw the check for 27,962.53 on his desk. "Look, I'm after a head-shrinker...a good head-shrinker. I heard you were one. Are you?" He nodded. "That check isn't endorsed yet," I snarled as he reached for the dough, "so don't let it make you too greedy."

He sighed. "All right, what's your trouble?"

I settled back and let him have it. "Doc, I wanta know what's wrong with me. I did something awful...you gotta help me out!"

He could see this was a serious case. Pushing the guitar and the copy of "Thunder and Roses" back into the corner, he called to his secretary in the next room. "Cancel all appointments for this afternoon. Tell Gold I'll see him tomorrow." He leaned back and tweaked his beard. "Now," he said, "let's get down to business. What's your name?"

"It's Sam M..." I started. "Oh, no you're not--I'm not telling you my name. Just call me Sam. And let's not even go into how old I am."

"I can't help you if you won't help yourself," he said. "All a head-shr...er, a psychiatrist does is listen to your troubles, let you cure yourself, and collect a big fat fee for listening. This is your show. Go on with the story."

I relaxed and lay back on the soft padding of the rug. "That I can't figure out is why I did it, Doc. Everything was fine...more than fine...and then I did it. I had to go and do it. But I had to, Doc--something bigger than all of us was driving me on."

"All of us?" he queried softly.

"Yes. There was Leo, who was behind the whole group, and Ed and two or three others....and baby. Baby was fifty." And then I screamed and screamed and screamed.

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When I came to he was searching my wallet. "Hey!" I said.

"Just getting my fee in advance, skinny. One or two more trauma's like that and you may not come out of it again."

I couldn't resist. "Yes," I muttered, "I thought it was rather traumatic, myself." He glared at me for that one, so I decided I'd better continue with my story. "It all started at Standard. I was down and out, licked before I even started. It was pretty cold in that hall, and I was lying there on my face, half frozen. Luckily only the top half of me had frozen, otherwise I could have died. Suddenly there was a kick in my side, breaking three ribs... that was how I met Leo."

The considers himself a keen judge of whoresflesh."

"Get up and follow me," he said, and walked off. I was too weak to make it myself and too proud to ask for help even if he had come back when I whimpered. At the end of the hall he turned and looked at me. 'If I came back and dragged you, would it be the same to you as if you'd walked?' I shuddered and somehow found the strength to climb to my feet and follow him. We walked for a long way until we came to a narrow room with "Startling" written on the door, and we went inside to see the rest of them.

"This is Sam," said Leo. 'He's come to be with us.' The others all looked at me. There was a mongoloid idiot behind one desk and a pretty girl at the other and for a minute I wondered if this wasn't "Other Worlds". The idiot was waving in the air with his arms while the girl at the typewriter watched him and typed. There were also two other people in the room who kept popping in and out all the time, but I ignored them. The man was speaking again. 'I'm Leo,' he continued. 'I don't know exactly what I do around here, but I keep the place together. That's important.'

"He turned away from me and left me to my own thoughts. One was uppermost in my mind. I looked around casually trying to spot it. Not in here...perhaps down the hall. I went to the door and tried it. Locked.

"What's the matter with you?" the girl behind the typewriter asked.

"I blushed. You don't explain those things to girls, even girls who blush with you. That was a funny thing about that office---we all blushed. But, anyhow, she seemed to understand. 'Oh. Well next time just ask me--I don't mind. It's down the hall...use the other door, this one is locked.'"

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I sat up, making a soft splash. Doc was in my wallet again, but I didn't notice. "It's real, Doc!" I screamed. "I'm really living it!"

"Naturally. That's because of microsubcutaneous fusion."

I leaned back and started to think again. "I stayed with Leo for a while until one day I had to decide everything for myself. I needed more money, and besides, I couldn't stand it any longer. That idiot and his Captain Future was driving me crazy. And those other two things with their wart-ears and frog-eyes and their Xeno--it was too much. I cut out. The first time, I went alone, but it wasn't any good. I couldn't do it all by myself. I went back and took the group with me. I don't know why, but it was important we stay together.

"We went to another place, a place Leo told us we could use if he ever died. Leo wanted to die, but we decided not to let him. It followed the plot, all right, but we had to have his money. We stayed at this other place for a while, even though they thought we stank. To please them, we even cleaned up a bit. And then everything started to get out of hand. I realized what was happening to us...we were getting along too well! Something had to be done, and I had to do it."

I came out screaming again, and Doc held me down on the rug. "We're going to get somewhere now," he said. And then he asked quickly, before I could think:.. "what's your name?"

Like a fool I answered him. "Merwin. But wait--you tricked me. I didn't mean to say that. I didn't mean to let you know."

"I know," he said. But you've got to come clean to help yourself."

"Look, head-shrinker, now that you know this much you might as well know it all. Okay, so my name is Merwin. I'm the guy who brought out FANTASTIC UNIVERSE for fifty cents. That's baby--baby is fifty. All the other prozines are thirty-five or even twenty-five. Except baby--baby is fifty. It was partly Leo's idea, really, because he wanted to get his money back. I wouldn't have done it alone. Not even with baby, and baby was fifty."

"Mr. Merwin," the head-shrinker was saying to me, "it's apparent your trouble  
((Ctd. on page 19))