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Title: Back to Julie

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Release Date: May 31, 2010 [EBook #32619]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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Back to

Julie

By RICHARD WILSON

Illustrated by VIDMER

The side-shuffle is no dance step. It's the choice between making time ... and doing time!

You can't go shooting off to *that* dimension for peanuts. I don't want to give you the impression that peanuts are in short supply here, or that our economy is in the fix of having to import them sidewise. What I'm trying to convey is that, if you're one of the rare ones functionally equipped to do the side-shuffle, you ought to be well paid for it—in any coin.

That's what I told Krasnow. And he wasn't after peanuts. "I'll do it," I said, "if you'll make it worth my while."

"I'd hardly expect you to do it for nothing," he replied reproachfully. "How much do you want?"

I told him. The amount shook him up, but only briefly.

"Okay," he said grudgingly. "I suppose I'll have to give it to you. But the stuff had better be good."

"Oh, it is," I assured him. "And you don't have to be afraid, because I couldn't possibly skip with the loot. I'll have to travel naked. I can't get there with so much as a sandal on one foot or a filling in a single tooth. Fortunately, my teeth are perfect."

Sweat poured off Krasnow's florid face as he worked the combination of his office safe. His fat jowls quivered unhappily around his cigar while he counted out the bills. Ten per cent was cash in advance, and the rest went into a bank account in my name. I paid off a batch of bills, then stripped and did my off-to-Buffalo.

"Honest" John Krasnow was a crooked District Attorney who wanted to be Governor and then President. He had the Machine, but he didn't have the People. And, because he needed the People, he needed me. I had been to this other dimension—the one on the farthest branch of the time-tree—and I could give him what he wanted.

Krasnow found out about it after I was hauled up in front of him on a check-kiting charge. I'd had something of a reputation before I got into difficulties and, in trying to live up to the reputation, I had done some plain and fancy financing. Nothing that fifteen to twenty grand wouldn't have fixed—but while I scrounged around, trying to get cash, I kited a few checks. They pyramided me right into the D.A.'s office, where Krasnow was properly sympathetic.

"How," he asked, "could a man of your standing in the scientific world stoop so low?" It developed into quite a lecture and, even coming from Krasnow, it made me feel pretty low.

So I began explaining. I told him where I was born, and where I went to school, and where I had taken my sabbaticals—including this other dimension. And Krasnow believed me. I can't account for it, except possibly because he knew he was a crook and knew I wasn't one—exactly. Anyway, he believed me, and we made the deal and I did the side-shuffle, as agreed.

The journey to that other dimension is not a pleasant one. It does disturbing things to the stomach, and you see everything thin and elongated, as if you're sitting too far to the side in a movie theater.

I got there, however, and waited for the hiccups to subside. *Hiccupi laterali*, I had called them when I considered writing an article for the *Medical Journal* after my first trip. With the hiccups gone, I stole some clothing—which was one of the riskiest parts of the program—and waited for morning. I didn't have any money, of course, so

I had to hitchhike into town.

I could have stolen myself a better fit, but people aren't clothes-conscious in that dimension. They're more interested in what you are and what you can do. The driver of the car that gave me a lift asked, "And what is your field of endeavor?"

I told him, "I am able to eliminate the long wait in ivory production by accelerating the growth cycle of elephants."

He was deeply impressed and tipped me handsomely. I was less impressed with his talent for growing cobless corn, and therefore had to return only a small part of the sum he gave me.

The world of this dimension had developed some remarkable parallels to Earth. I mean our Earth, which falls into what I have designated Timeline One Point One, since it's the Earth with which I am most familiar. Every other world that has a language calls itself Earth, too. I had to visit briefly hundreds of the lateral worlds, hovering over primordial swamps, limitless oceans, insect kingdoms and radioactive planetoids, before I found the one that was truly parallel.

It existed in Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight, and it had refrigerators, platinum blondes, automobiles, airplanes, apple pie, tabloids, television, scotch and soda—just about everything we think makes life worthwhile. But it had its little differences, which was only to be expected in a timeline where the bionomics could create a new world each time someone changed his mind.

Thus, the cobless-corn man was driving what looked to me like a Chevrolet, but which was a Morton in his world. He let me off near a downtown restaurant where, thanks to our little exchange of talent talk, I had enough money for breakfast. It was considered unethical to swap talent talk outside the limits of certain rigidly defined groups, so I didn't try to out-impress the waitress.

Fed, and filling my stolen clothes a bit better, I walked to the recorder's office and spent the rest of the morning looking up old documents. There was nothing there for Krasnow, as I had expected. But for me there was a very pretty file clerk. Talking to her, I verified my impression that human instincts and relationships were much the same in this dimension as in my own—except in the one basic respect that interested Krasnow, of course.

The file clerk and I lunched together and then I spent the afternoon in the library. But I didn't find anything there, either, and then I had dinner with her. She said her name was Julie. I told her mine was Heck, for Hector, which it is. She thought this was "awfully cute" and we got along fine.



Julie had a delightful apartment and a matching sense of hospitality. The following day, when she went to work, I stayed home and washed the dishes and made the bed and used the telephone.

I ran up quite a bill with my long-distance calls, but I found out what I needed to know. I impressed a lot of people with my elephant story and pretended to be

impressed hardly at all with what they told me they did—although often I was, very much.

The trouble with these people is that they no longer know how to lie, if that can be listed as trouble. I don't think it can. Neither did Krasnow, obviously. He'd never have sent me off on my expensive side-trip if he had.

Of course, Krasnow looked at it objectively. What he wanted from Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight was not for himself. It was for everybody else. He wanted the formula for the truth gas these people had developed long ago and loosed upon their world to put a stop to wars.

They had been in a bad way, although no worse than the sort of problem we were up against. Their trans-ocean squabbles and power politics seemed to have settled into a pattern of a war or two per generation. Just like us. Hence, the man who invented the truth gas became a global hero, after a certain amount of cynicism and skepticism. All the doubts vanished, naturally, once the gas got to working. And so did war.



You can't do much plotting and scheming if, every time you open your mouth to tell a lie, you stammer, sweat, turn red and gasp for breath. It's a dead giveaway. Nobody tries it more than once.

One or two men had tried to nullify the gas or work out a local antidote, either as a pure research project or through power-madness. But, because they had had to state their purposes as soon as they thought of them, they were put away. Neat. Very neat.

What I wanted was the formula for the truth gas. Its location wasn't exactly a secret in this land of complete candor, but it wasn't writ large on any wall for all to see, either. They kept it in their capital—located about where our Omaha is—on file among the Vital Statistics.

I took a superjet out there.

I had no trouble posing as a historian entitled to the facts. The gas didn't work on me, you see, because it was adjusted to the physiology of that timeline. There was just enough difference between us for it not to make me stick to the truth.

"We'll write out the formula for you," I was told obligingly. "But you'll have to sign the usual statement."

"Of course," I said. "Which one is that?"

"The one that says you won't publish it, and will destroy your copy when it has served your research purpose, without letting anyone else see it."

"Oh, *that* statement," I said.

I signed freely, told my elephant story and departed in an aura of good will.

The jet got me back that same evening. Julie fixed me up a snack, and we discussed how pretty she was and how nice I was.

I had everything Krasnow wanted now. I felt pretty good about it, because there was nobody else who could have done the job for him, and because it wasn't spying, really. Earth One Point One on the Timeline is world enough for Krasnow, I'm sure. Besides, dimensions don't have wars with one another. Too many things can go wrong.

Julie was lovely and I hated to leave the next morning, but it was my job. I told her, "I'm afraid I have to leave town for a bit, dear, but I'll be back very soon. Business, you know."

Being a Seventeen Point Zero Eight girl, Julie had no reason to doubt me. "Make it *very* soon," she whispered, her lips close to my ear.

So I came back, and now Krasnow has what he wants. He's delighted, as he should be. I've made up the gas for him and adjusted the formula so that it will work on people of our timeline. It's high-power stuff and a little will go a long way. I also made up an antidote for him. This was easy, since I could work on it without feeling any compulsion to tell everybody what I was doing and why.

Krasnow plans to release the truth gas just before the state convention. He'll be nominated, of course, and after November he'll be Governor. With everyone else compelled to tell the truth, it should be a cinch for him. He's a patient man, Honest John Krasnow is, and he's willing to wait four years for the Presidency.

I ought to be happy too. With the money Krasnow gave me, I've been living in the style to which I've always wanted to be accustomed. He has offered me a place on his staff and, somewhat superfluously, the use of his antidote. Naturally, the reason he was so magnanimous was that he doesn't want anyone else around who knows his gimmick and might have to tell the truth about it.

But I have had enough of this dimension now—now that Krasnow has what I promised him. He's going to use it tomorrow. And if I know Honest John—and I do—not even the Presidency will be big enough for him.

So I'm going back to Julie.

There are some obvious questions in your mind, I know, such as: Why did I get the formula for Krasnow, knowing there was no way for him to prosecute me while I was in Julie's dimension? And what made me come back?

In short—what was in it for me?

Let's call it research. Krasnow is a big-time operator; I've always been, you might say, in the peanut end of the game. He had a great deal to teach me and I, I'm happy to say, was an apt pupil. You might speculate on what's in it for you, because, if you ask me, anybody who can do the side-shuffle should do it before Krasnow becomes President.

However, don't go to Seventeen Point Zero Eight unless you want to swap one Krasnow for another. The fact is that I've learned I can be one in Julie's dimension. After all, their formula doesn't work on me—but I can assure you that it will work on you.

And that elephant story I told on my last visit is, as I've indicated, in the peanut category. All Krasnow has is a country. I'll have a whole world.

There's nothing like study under a master, is there?

I should be back to Julie by midnight if I start now.

—**RICHARD WILSON**

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