

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Jack of No Trades, by Evelyn E. Smith

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Jack of No Trades

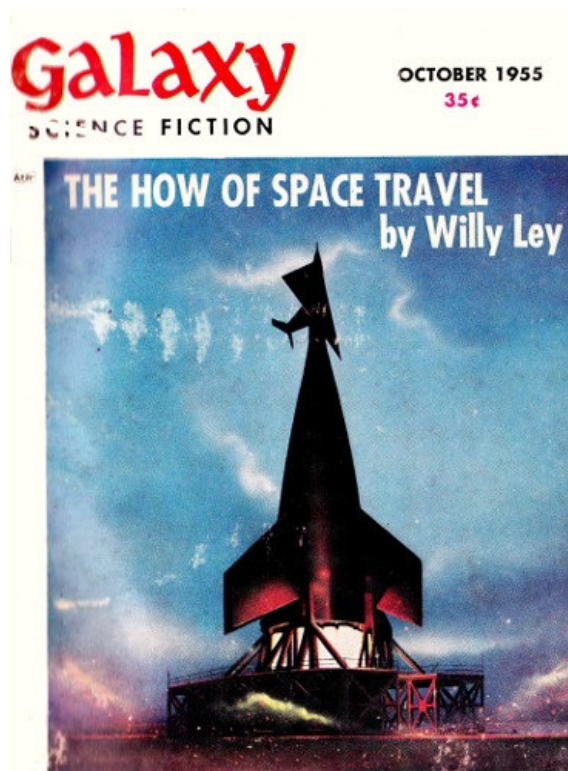
Author: Evelyn E. Smith
Illustrator: Cavat

Release date: August 31, 2015 [EBook #49838]

Language: English

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

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK OF NO TRADES ***



Jack of No Trades

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by CAVAT

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from Galaxy October 1955.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright
on this publication was renewed.]**

*I was psick of Psi powers, not having any. Or didn't I? Maybe they'd psee otherwise
psomeday!*

I walked into the dining room and collided with a floating mass of fabric, which promptly draped itself over me like a sentient shroud.

"Oh, for God's sake, Kevin!" my middle brother's voice came muffled through the folds. "If you can't help, at least don't hinder!"

I managed to struggle out of the tablecloth, even though it seemed to be trying to wrap itself around me. When Danny got excited, he lost his mental grip.

"I could help," I yelled as soon as I got my head free, "if anybody would let me and, what's more, I could set the table a damn sight faster by hand than you do with 'kinesis.'"

Just then Father appeared at the head of the table. He could as easily have walked downstairs as teleported, but I belonged to a family of exhibitionists. And Father tended to show off as if he were still a kid. Not that he looked his age—he was big and blond, like Danny and Tim and me, and could have passed for our older brother.

"Boys, boys!" he reproved us. "Danny, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—picking on poor Kev."

Even if it hadn't been Danny's fault, he would still have been blamed.

Nobody was ever supposed to raise a voice or a hand or a thought to poor afflicted Kev, because nature had picked on me enough. And the nicer everybody was to me, the nastier I became, since only when they lost their tempers could I get—or so I believed—their true attitude toward me.

How else could I tell?

"Sorry, fella," Dan apologized to me. The tablecloth spread itself out on the table. "Wrinkles," he grumbled to himself. "Wrinkles. And I had it so nice and smooth before. Mother will be furious."

"If she were going to be furious, she'd be furious already," Father reminded him sadly. It must be tough to be married to a deep-probe telepath, I thought, and I felt a sudden wave of sympathy for him. It was so seldom I got the chance to feel sorry for anyone except myself. "But I think you'll find she understands."

"She knows, all right," Danny remarked as he went on into the kitchen, "but I'm not sure she always understands."

I was surprised to find him so perceptive on the abstract level, because he wasn't what you might call an understanding person, either.

"There are tensions in this room," my sister announced as she slouched in, not quite awake yet, "and hatred. I could feel them all the way upstairs. And today I'm working on the Sleepsweet Mattress copy, so I must feel absolutely tranquil. Everyone will think beautiful thoughts, please."

She sat down just as a glass of orange juice was arriving at her place; Danny apparently didn't know she'd come in already. The glass bumped into the back of her neck, tilted and poured its contents over her shoulder and down her very considerable décolletage. Being a mere primitive, I couldn't help laughing.

"Danny, you fumbler!" she screamed.

Danny erupted from the kitchen. "How many times have I asked all of you not to sit down until I've got everything on the table? Always a lot of interfering busybodies getting in the way."

"I don't see why you have to set the table at all," she retorted. "A robot could do it better and faster than you. Even Kev could." She turned quickly toward me. "Oh, I am sorry, Kevin."

I didn't say anything; I was too busy pressing my hands down on the back of the chair to make my knuckles turn white.

Sylvia's face turned even whiter. "Father, stop him—*stop* him! He's hating again! I can't stand it!"

Father looked at me, then at her. "I don't think he can help it, Sylvia."

I grinned. "That's right—I'm just a poor atavism with no control over myself a-tall."

Finally my mother came in from the kitchen; she was an old-fashioned woman and didn't hold with robocooks. One quick glance at me gave her the complete details, even though I quickly protested, "It's illegal to probe anyone without permission."

"I used to probe you to find out when you needed your diapers changed," she said tartly, "and I'll probe you now. You should watch yourself, Sylvia—poor Kevin isn't responsible."

She didn't need to probe to get the blast of naked emotion that spurted out from me. My sister screamed and even Father looked uncomfortable. Danny stomped back into the kitchen, muttering to himself.

Mother's lips tightened. "Sylvia, go upstairs and change your dress. Kevin, do I have to make an appointment for you at the clinic again?" A psychiatrist never diagnosed members of his own family—that is, not officially; they couldn't help offering thumbnail diagnoses any more than they could help having thumbnails.

"No use," I said, deciding it was safe to drop into my chair. "Who can adjust me to an environment to which I'm fundamentally unsuited?"

"Maybe there is something physically wrong with him, Amy," my father suggested hopefully. "Maybe you should make an appointment for him at the cure-all?"

Mother shook her neatly coiffed head. "He's been to it dozens of times and he always checks out in splendid shape. None of us can spare the time to go with him again, just on an off-chance, and he could hardly be allowed to make such a long trip all by himself. Pity there isn't a machine in every community, but, then, we don't really need them."

Now that the virus diseases had been licked, people hardly ever got sick any more and, when they did, it was mostly psychosomatic. Life was so well organized that there weren't even many accidents these days. It was a safe, orderly existence for those who fitted into it—which accounted for more than ninety-five per cent of the population. The only ones who didn't adjust were those who couldn't, like me—psi-deficients, throwbacks to an earlier era. There were no physical cripples, because anybody could have a new arm or a new leg grafted on, but you couldn't graft psi powers onto an atavism or, if you could, the technique hadn't been developed yet.

"I feel a sense of impending doom brooding over this household," my youngest brother remarked cheerfully as he vaulted into his chair.

"You always do, Timothy," my mother said, unfolding her napkin. "And I must say it's not in good taste, especially at breakfast."

He reached for his juice. "Guess this is a doomed household. And what was all that emotional uproar about?"

"The usual," Sylvia said from the doorway before anyone else could answer. She slid warily into her chair. "Hey, Dan, I'm here!" she called. "If anything else comes in, it comes in manually, understand?"

"Oh, all right." Dan emerged from the kitchen with a tray of food floating ahead of him.

"The usual? Trouble with Kev?" Tim looked at me narrowly. "Somehow my sense of ominousness is connected with him."

"Well, that's perfectly natural—" Sylvia began, then stopped as Mother caught her eye.

"I didn't mean that," Tim said. "I still say Kev's got something we can't figure out."

"You've been saying that for years," Danny protested, "and he's been tested for every faculty under the Sun. He can't telepath or teleport or telekinesthesis or even teletype. He can't precognize or prefix or prepossess. He can't—"

"Strictly a bundle of no-talent, that's me," I interrupted, trying to keep my animal feelings from getting the better of me. That was how my family thought of me, I knew—as an animal, and not a very lovable one, either.

"No," Tim said, "he's just got something we haven't developed a test for. It'll come out some day, you'll see." He smiled at me.

I smiled at him gratefully; he was the only member of my family who really seemed to like me in spite of my handicap. "It won't work, Tim. I know you're trying to be kind, but—"

"He's not saying it just to be kind," my mother put in. "He means it. Not that I want to arouse false hopes, Kevin," she added with grim scrupulousness. "Tim's awfully young yet and I wouldn't trust his extracurricular prognostications too far."

Nonetheless, I couldn't help feeling a feeble renewal of old hopes. After all, young or not, Tim was a hell of a good prognosticator; he wouldn't have risen so rapidly to the position he held in the Weather Bureau if he hadn't been pretty near tops in foreboding.

Mother smiled sadly at my thoughts, but I didn't let that discourage me. As Danny had said, she *knew* but she didn't really *understand*. Nobody, for all of his or her psi power, really understood me.

Breakfast was finally over and the rest of my family dispersed to their various jobs. Father simply took his briefcase and disappeared—he was a traveling salesman and he had a morning appointment clear across the continent. The others, not having his particular gift, had to take the helibus to their different destinations. Mother, as I said, was a psychiatrist. Sylvia wrote advertising copy. Tim was a meteorologist. Dan was a junior executive in a furniture moving company and expected a promotion to senior rank as soon as he achieved a better mental grip on pianos.

Only I had no job, no profession, no place in life. Of course there were certain menial tasks a psi-negative could perform, but my parents would have none of them—partly for my sake, but mostly for the sake of their own community standing.

"We don't need what little money Kev could bring in," my father always said. "I can afford to support my family. He can stay home and take care of the house."

And that's what I did. Not that there was much to do except call a techno whenever one of the servomechanisms missed a beat. True enough, those things had to be watched mighty carefully because, if they broke down, it sometimes took days before the repair and/or replacement robots could come. There never were enough of them because ours was a constructive society. Still, being a machine-sitter isn't very much of a career. And every function that wasn't the prerogative of a machine could be done ten times more quickly and efficiently by some member of my family than I could do it. If I went ahead and did something anyway, they would just do it all over again when they got home.

So I had nothing to do all day. I had a special dispensation to take books out of the local Archives, because I was a deficient and couldn't receive the tellie programs. Almost everybody on Earth was telepathic to some degree and could get the amplified projections even if he couldn't transmit or receive with his natural powers. But I got nothing. I had to derive all my recreation from reading, and you can get awfully tired of books, especially when they're all at least a hundred years old and written by primitives. I could borrow sound tapes, but they also bored me after a while.

I thought maybe I could develop a talent for composing or painting, which would classify me as a telesensitive—artistic ability being considered as the oldest, if least important, psi power—but I couldn't even do anything like that.

About all there was left for me was to take long walks. Athletics were out of the question; I couldn't compete with psi-boys and they didn't want to compete with me. All the people in the neighborhood knew me and were nice to me, but I didn't need to be a 'path to tell what they were saying to one another when I hove into sight. "There's that oldest Faraday boy. Pity, such a talented family, to have a defective."



I didn't have a girl, either. Although some of them were sort of attracted to me—I could see that—they could hardly go out with me without exposing themselves to ridicule. In their sandals, I would have done the same thing, but that didn't stop me from hating them.

I wished I had been born a couple of hundred years ago—before people started playing around with nuclear energy and filling the air with radiations that they were afraid would turn human beings into hideous monsters. Instead, they developed the psi powers that had always been latent in the species until we developed into a race of supermen. I don't know why I say *we*—in 1960 or so, I might have been considered superior, but in 2102 I was just the Faradays' idiot boy.

Exploring space should have been my hope. If there had been anything useful or interesting on any of the other planets, I might have found a niche for myself there. In totally new surroundings,

the psi powers geared to another environment might not be an advantage. But by the time I was ten, it was discovered that the other planets were just barren hunks of rock, with pressures and climates and atmospheres drastically unsuited to human life. A year or so before, the hyperdrive had been developed on Earth and ships had been sent out to explore the stars, but I had no hope left in that direction any more.

I was an atavism in a world of peace and plenty. Peace, because people couldn't indulge in war or even crime with so many telepaths running around—not because, I told myself, the capacity for primitive behavior wasn't just as latent in everybody else as the psi talent seemed latent in me. Tim must be right, I thought—I must have some undreamed-of power that only the right circumstances would bring out. But what was that power?

For years I had speculated on what my potential talent might be, explored every wild possibility I could conceive of and found none productive of even an ambiguous result with which I could fool myself. As I approached adulthood, I began to concede that I was probably nothing more than what I seemed to be—a simple psi-negative. Yet, from time to time, hope surged up again, as it had today, in spite of my knowledge that my hope was an impossibility. Who ever heard of latent psi powers showing themselves in an individual as old as twenty-six?

I was almost alone in the parks where I used to walk, because people liked to commune with one another those days rather than with nature. Even gardening had very little popularity. But I found myself most at home in those woodland—or, rather, pseudo-woodland—surroundings, able to identify more readily with the trees and flowers than I could with my own kind. A fallen tree or a broken blossom would excite more sympathy from me than the minor catastrophes that will beset any household, no matter how gifted, and I would shy away from bloody noses or cut fingers, thus giving myself a reputation for callousness as well as extrasensory imbecility.

However, I was no more callous in steering clear of human breakdowns than I was in not shedding tears over the household machines when they broke down, for I felt no more closely akin to my parents and siblings than I did to the mechanisms that served and, sometimes, failed us.

On that day, I walked farther than I had intended and, by the time I got back home, I found the rest of my family had returned before me. They seemed to be excited about something and were surprised to see me so calm.

"Aren't you even interested in anything outside your own immediate concerns, Kev?" Sylvia demanded, despite Father's efforts to shush her.

"Can't you remember that Kev isn't able to receive the tellies?" Tim shot back at her. "He probably doesn't even know what's happened."

"Well, what did happen?" I asked, trying not to snap.

"One starship got back from Alpha Centauri," Danny said excitedly. "There are two inhabited Earth-type planets there!"

This was for me; this was it at last! I tried not to show my enthusiasm, though I knew that was futile. My relatives could keep their thoughts and emotions from me; I couldn't keep mine from them. "What kind of life inhabits them? Humanoid?"

"Uh-uh." Danny shook his head. "And hostile. The crew of the starship says they were attacked immediately on landing. When they turned and left, they were followed here by one of the alien ships. Must be a pretty advanced race to have spaceships. Anyhow, the extraterrestrial ship headed back as soon as it got a fix on where ours was going."

"But if they're hostile," I said thoughtfully, "it might mean war."

"Of course. That's why everybody's so wrought up. We hope it's peace, but we'll have to prepare for war just in case."

There hadn't been a war on Earth for well over a hundred years, but we hadn't been so foolish as to obliterate all knowledge of military techniques and weapons. The alien ship wouldn't be able to come back with reinforcements—if such were its intention—in less than six months. This meant time to get together a stockpile of weapons, though we had no idea of how effective our defenses would be against the aliens' armament.

They might have strange and terrible weapons against which we would be powerless. On the other hand, our side would have the benefits of telekinetically guided missiles, teleported saboteurs, telepaths to pick up the alien strategy, and prognosticators to determine the outcome of each battle and see whether it was worth fighting in the first place.

Everybody on Earth hoped for peace. Everybody, that is, except me. I had been unable to achieve any sense of identity with the world in which I lived, and it was almost worth the loss of personal survival to know that my own smug species could look silly against a still more talented race.

"It isn't so much our defense that worries me," my mother muttered, "as lack of adequate medical machinery. War is bound to mean casualties and there aren't enough cure-alls on the planet to

take care of them. It's useless to expect the government to build more right now; they'll be too busy producing weapons. Sylvia, you'd better take a leave of absence from your job and come down to Psycho Center to learn first-aid techniques. And you too, Kevin," she added, obviously a little surprised herself at what she was saying. "Probably you'd be even better at it than Sylvia since you aren't sensitive to other people's pain."

I looked at her.

"It *is* an ill wind," she agreed, smiling wryly, "but don't let me catch you thinking that way, Kevin. Can't you see it would be better that there should be no war and you should remain useless?"

I couldn't see it, of course, and she knew that, with her wretched talent for stripping away my feeble attempts at privacy. Psi-powers usually included some ability to form a mental shield; being without one, I was necessarily devoid of the other.

My attitude didn't matter, though, because it was definitely war. The aliens came back with a fleet clearly bent on our annihilation—even the 'paths couldn't figure out their motives, for the thought pattern was entirely different from ours—and the war was on.

I had enjoyed learning first-aid; it was the first time I had ever worked with people as an equal. And I was good at it because psi-powers aren't much of an advantage there. Telekinesis maybe a little, but I was big enough to lift anybody without needing any superhuman abilities—normal human abilities, rather.

"Gee, Mr. Faraday," one of the other students breathed, "you're so strong. And without 'kinesis or anything."

I looked at her and liked what I saw. She was blonde and pretty. "My name's not Mr. Faraday," I said. "It's Kevin."

"My name's Lucy," she giggled.

No girl had ever giggled at me in that way before. Immediately I started to envision a beautiful future for the two of us, then flushed when I realized that she might be a telepath. But she was winding a tourniquet around the arm of another member of the class with apparent unconcern.

"Hey, quit that!" the windee yelled. "You're making it too tight! I'll be mortified!"

So Lucy was obviously not a telepath. Later I found out she was only a low-grade telesensitive—just a poetess—so I had nothing to worry about as far as having my thoughts read went. I was a little afraid of Sylvia's kidding me about my first romance, but, as it happened, she got interested in one of the guys who was taking the class with us, and she was not only too busy to be bothered with me, but in too vulnerable a position herself.

However, when the actual bombs—or their alien equivalent—struck near our town, I wasn't nearly so happy, especially after they started carrying the wounded into the Psycho Center, which had been turned into a hospital for the duration. I took one look at the gory scene—I had never seen anybody really injured before; few people had, as a matter of fact—and started for the door. But Mother was already blocking the way. It was easy to see from which side of the family Tim had got his talent for prognostication.

"If the telepaths who can pick up all the pain can stand this, Kevin," she said, "*you* certainly can." And there was no kindness at all in the *you*.

She gave me a shove toward the nearest stretcher. "Go on—now's your chance to show you're of some use in this world."

Gritting my teeth, I turned to the man on the stretcher. Something had pretty near torn half his face away. It was all there, but not in the right place, and it wasn't pretty. I turned away, caught my mother's eye, and then I didn't even dare to throw up. I looked at that smashed face again and all the first-aid lessons I'd had flew out of my head as if some super-psi had plucked them from me.

The man was bleeding terribly. I had never seen blood pouring out like that before. The first thing to do, I figured sickly, was mop it up. I wet a sponge and dabbed gingerly at the face, but my hands were shaking so hard that the sponge slipped and my fingers were on the raw gaping wound. I could feel the warm viscosity of the blood and nothing, not even my mother, could keep my meal down this time, I thought.

Mother had uttered a sound of exasperation as I dropped the sponge. I could hear her coming toward me. Then I heard her gasp. I looked at my patient and my mouth dropped open. For suddenly there was no wound, no wound at all—just a little blood and the fellow's face was whole again. Not even a scar.

"Wha—wha happened?" he asked. "It doesn't hurt any more!"

He touched his cheek and looked up at me with frightened eyes. And I was frightened, too—too frightened to be sick, too frightened to do anything but stare witlessly at him.

"Touch some of the others, quick!" my mother commanded, pushing astounded attendants away from stretchers.

I touched broken limbs and torn bodies and shattered heads, and they were whole again right

away. Everybody in the room was looking at me in the way I had always dreamed of being looked at. Lucy was opening and shutting her beautiful mouth like a beautiful fish. In fact, the whole thing was just like a dream, except that I was awake. I couldn't have imagined all those horrors.

But the horrors soon weren't horrors any more. I began to find them almost pleasing; the worse a wound was, the more I appreciated it. There was so much more satisfaction, virtually an esthetic thrill, in seeing a horrible jagged tear smooth away, heal, not in days, as it would have done under the cure-all, but in seconds.

"Timothy was right," my mother said, her eyes filled with tears, "and I was wrong ever to have doubted. You have a gift, son—" and she said the word son loud and clear so that everybody could hear it—"the greatest gift of all, that of healing." She looked at me proudly. And Lucy and the others looked at me as if I were a god or something.

I felt ... well, good.

"I wonder why we never thought of healing as a potential psi-power," my mother said to me later, when I was catching a snatch of rest and she was lighting cigarettes and offering me cups of coffee in an attempt to make up twenty-six years of indifference, perhaps dislike, all at once. "The ability to heal *is* recorded in history, only we never paid much attention to it."

"Recorded?" I asked, a little jealously.

"Of course," she smiled. "Remember the King's Evil?"

I should have known without her reminding me, after all the old books I had read. "Scrofula, wasn't it? They called it that because the touch of certain kings was supposed to cure it ... and other diseases, too, I guess."

She nodded. "Certain people must have had the healing power and that's probably why they originally got to be the rulers."

In a very short time, I became a pretty important person. All the other deficients in the world were tested for the healing power and all of them turned out negative. I proved to be the only human healer alive, and not only that, I could work a thousand times more efficiently and effectively than any of the machines. The government built a hospital just for my work! Wounded people were ferried there from all over the world and I cured them. I could do practically everything except raise the dead and sometimes I wondered whether, with a little practice, I wouldn't be able to do even that.

When I came to my new office, whom did I find waiting there for me but Lucy, her trim figure enhanced by a snug blue and white uniform. "I'm your assistant, Kev," she said shyly.

I looked at her. "You are?"

"I—I hope you want me," she went on, coyness now mixing with apprehension.

I gave her shoulder a squeeze. "I do want you, Lucy. More than I can tell you now. After all this is over, there's something more I want to say. But right now—" I clapped her arm—"there's a job to be done."

"Yes, Kevin," she said, glaring at me for some reason I didn't have time to investigate or interpret at the moment. My patients were waiting for me.

They gave me everything else I could possibly need, except enough sleep, and I myself didn't want that. I wanted to heal. I wanted to show my fellow human beings that, though I couldn't receive or transmit thoughts or foretell the future or move things with my mind, all those powers were useless without life, and that was what I could give.

I took pride in my work. It was good to stop pain and ugliness, to know that, if it weren't for me, these people would be dead or permanently disfigured. In a sense, they were—well, my children; I felt a warm glow of affection toward them.

They felt the same way toward me. I knew because the secret of the hospital soon leaked out—during all those years of peace, the government had lost whatever facility it had for keeping secrets—and people used to come in droves, hoping for a glimpse of me.

The government pointed out that such crowds outside the building might attract the enemy's attention. I was the most important individual on Earth, they told my followers, and my safety couldn't be risked. The human race at this stage was pretty docile. The crowds went away. And it was right that they should; I didn't want to be risked any more than they wanted to risk me.

Plenty of people did come to see me officially—the President, generals, all kinds of big wheels, bringing citations, medals and other obsolete honors they'd revived primarily for me. It was wonderful. I began to love everybody.

"Don't you think you're putting too much of yourself into this, Kev?" Lucy asked me one day.

I gave her an incredulous glance. "You mean I shouldn't help people?"

"Of course you should help them. I didn't mean anything like that. Just ... well, you're getting too

bound up in your work."

"Why shouldn't I be?" Then the truth, as I thought, dawned on me. "Are you jealous, Lucy?"

She lowered her eyes. "Not only that, but the war's bound to come to an end, you know, and—"

It was the first part of her sentence that interested me. "Why, do you mean—"

And just then a fresh batch of casualties arrived and I had to tend to them. For the next few days, I was so busy, I didn't get the chance to have the long talk with Lucy I'd wanted....

Then, after only four months, the war suddenly stopped. It seemed that the aliens' weapons, despite their undeniable mysteriousness, were not equal to ours. And they had the added disadvantage of being light-years away from home base. So the remnant of their fleet took off and blew itself up just outside of Mars, which we understood to be the equivalent of unconditional surrender. And it was; we never heard from the Centaurians again.

Peace once more. I had a little mopping up to do at the hospital; then I collected my possessions and went back home after a dignitary—only the Vice President this time—had thanked me on behalf of a grateful country. I wasn't needed any more.

For a while, I was glad to be back home. I was a celebrity. People dropped in from all around to see me and talk to me. And my family, basking in the reflection of glory, was nice to me ... for a while.

"I don't have any trouble making appointments with any firm," my father boasted, "when I tell 'em I'm the father of Kevin Faraday."

Mother smiled approvingly—Tim, a little sadly. He was the only one who didn't seem pleased by what had happened to me, even though he'd prophesied it.

Sylvia slipped her arm through mine. "The agency wondered whether you wouldn't give them a testimonial for Panacetic Pills, Kev," she said, squeezing my arm. "They'd pay a lot, and the rest of the family sure could use the money if you're too high-minded to accept it."

"I couldn't do a thing like that, Sylvia. It wouldn't be ethical."

"Why wouldn't it be?" She dropped my arm. "The pills couldn't possibly hurt anybody. Maybe take a little business away from Mother, but Mother doesn't mind, do you, dear?"

Mother frowned.

"But people would think the pills had my healing powers," I explained. "I would be breaking faith with myself if I shilled for them."

Sylvia snorted. "Breaking faith with himself. Look who's talking!"

"Sylvia," my mother said. "Please."

But Sylvia went on—she was in an overwrought state because her guy hadn't called her, though that was no reason to take it out on me. "Who needs healing power now? The machines can cope with all peacetime ailments. Better take your loot while the getting's good, Kev."

"Nevertheless, Kevin is right, Sylvia," my mother said. "He mustn't prostitute his talent."

"And we don't actually need the money the testimonial could bring in, no matter how much it is," my father said a little wistfully. "I can support my family."

Tim sighed.

The months went on. Once again there was nothing for me to do, only it was worse for me now because I had tasted usefulness and fame. People did come for a while with their headaches and cut fingers for me to heal, and I was happy healing them until I realized they were just coming to make me feel good. They didn't really need me. Anybody who had anything seriously wrong with him went to a psychiatrist or a machine, same as always. I healed them too quickly for them to have time to take pleasure in it. They couldn't talk for days about a three-second operation.

By and by, even the cut fingers didn't come. Maybe I hadn't been exactly gracious toward the end. Maybe the whole thing was my fault. Even the Lucy business. My mother said it was, anyhow.

You see, Lucy lived quite a distance away and we couldn't call each other up because of my not being able to use the tellies. We wrote and I went to see her a few times, and then she came to meet my family. Once.

It was a ghastly evening. We all sat around stiffly, my family being excessively polite to her, thinking, I knew, that this was my only chance to get myself a wife and so they'd better be nice to the girl, no matter what she was like. And seeing her with what I fancied to be their eyes, I realized that she wasn't outstandingly pretty, particularly bright, or even very talented.

And what was she thinking? That she had got herself virtually engaged to a useless half-sense because he had had a brief moment of glory as a war hero? Trapped with this imbecile and his dull, stuffy family, and not being able to get out of it without being cruel?

What were they *actually* thinking? I didn't know. But *they* did—Mother knew what everybody was thinking, right down to the last convolution of the subconscious mind and Sylvia knew what everyone else was feeling, and the others ... they knew or at least sensed part of what was going on. But I was impercipient, I couldn't tell anything, I was excluded—out in the cold—and, being unable ever really to know, was forced to draw the worst conclusions.

I took Lucy home that evening. They had to trust me that far alone because it would have looked absurd for Danny or Tim to come along as chaperone, and anyway I had been there alone before, when I had gone to see her.

"Lucy," I said as we stood awkwardly before her door, "I don't want you to feel, just because of what might have happened in a burst of—of patriotic fervor, that you're bound or—"

"No, Kevin," she murmured, without looking at me. "I understand. I don't feel bound or—committed in any way. And you mustn't feel bound, either."

"That's good." I felt a deep sense of sorrow working its way down to settle in my viscera and, if she'd had much perceptiveness, things might have been different then. But she hadn't. I took a deep breath, determined to carry my heartbreak off with dignity. "Well, good-by, Lucy."

Although she had never really been close to me—in fact, I had never so much as kissed her—I felt lonelier now, without even the hope of her, than I ever had before. I began to take my long walks in the park again, brooding over the power that might have been mine, if only I hadn't been such a damn fool as to give freely without asking anything in return. During the war, I could have got anything I wanted in exchange for what I'd done, or, rather, for what I could do, but I'd been too busy healing. Now it was too late for asking.

Nature, being all I had left, became closer to me than ever before. And one morning, after a violent storm the night before, I mourned over the fallen trees and smashed flowers as I had never mourned over fallen and smashed men—first, because I hadn't cared, and then because I had known I could help.

Come to think of it, how did I know it was only people I could help?

"Mother," I said eagerly when I came home that evening, "I can heal other things besides people! Trees and shrubs and—"

"That's nice, dear. Perhaps we can get you a job with the Park Department if you're tired of sitting home, and in the meantime you'd better comb those leaves out of your hair. Sylvia, did you call that techno?"

"Yes, Mother," Sylvia said gloomily. Her guy still hadn't called. Knowing now how she must feel, I could feel sorry for her. "It said it'll be over as soon as it can, but that it might take days."

"We'll have to eat synthetics for dinner if that stove isn't fixed soon," my mother said fretfully, and went off into the kitchen to mess around with the machinery and thus make certain the techno had a real hard job on its hands when it finally did show up.

Oh, the devil with it, I thought. No use hoping to interest the family in any extension of my gift that had no practical value except for nature lovers. I might as well seize such meager chances as were still open to me. I wasn't going to be an idealistic idiot any longer.

"Sylvie," I said to my sister, "I've changed my mind about that testimonial."

She looked blankly at me out of her reverie. "What testimonial?"

"The—you know, the Panacetic Pills."

She laughed and patted me on the shoulder, not unkindly, because she could probably feel a sympathy in me now that she never could before. "Too late for that, honey. Your name wouldn't mean a thing any more."

So many of them owed their lives to me—and yet they had forgotten me.

Tim looked at me. "Be careful, Kev," he said anxiously.

"Careful of what?"

"I don't know exactly." He ran his hand through his hair. "But be careful, won't you?"

Just at that moment, an easy chair floated in from the next room, banged into me, swerved, and crashed into a table. Danny, who had been thinking of going into interior decoration as a sideline to his business, had been making the furniture leap without looking first.

I gave Tim a reproachful glance as I used my gift to heal my bruised shin. "You might have been a little more explicit," I complained. "I'm no 'path."

"I didn't mean—" But Danny caromed into Tim on his way to inspect the damage. My whole family was so used to relying on their psi powers that they were pretty clumsy when it came to using the merely physical ones.

Danny looked sadly at the wreckage. The chair was only nicked, but the table was pretty well

smashed. "Gee, Kev," he said mournfully, "if only you could fix furniture the way you fix up people."

"I can heal trees," I said. "And they're wood."

"So try the table," Sylvia proposed. "It's going to cost you anything?"

Danny looked at me hopefully.

I went over and touched the table. At first nothing happened. And then the shattered bits of wood sort of shimmered together and it was whole again.

Danny's and Sylvia's eyes bugged out. So did mine, as a matter of fact. Only Tim didn't look surprised, just a little sadder.

Mother appeared from the kitchen so fast, you'd think she'd caught teleportation from Father. "Kevin!" she cried, her eyes shining with an enthusiasm that my healing of people had never evoked in her. She was a conscientious psychiatrist, but a passionate cook. "Come in here and see what you can do with this stove."

My siblings treading on my heels, I went in and fixed it. Like that. She looked at me with genuine mother love in her eyes. "My boy," she breathed adoringly.

"Pianos!" Danny yelped suddenly. Everybody looked at him. "If you worked along with me, Kev," he explained, "nobody would ever have to know if I dropped 'em. I could be a senior executive and no questions asked."

"But that wouldn't be ethical," Sylvia suggested, with a sidelong glance at me.

"My ethical values have come down to Earth," I said. "Be glad to help you out, Dan. And the same goes for you, Sylvie. 'Use Kevin Faraday. A Million Times More Efficient than Glue.' Nothing for nothing any more, though—I have to be as professional as everybody and I've got a career to get started."

Sylvia sighed. "I wish there were other things you could fix besides people and furniture. Intangibles."

"Like broken hearts, maybe?"

She smiled. "Maybe."

"I'll try," I said, and I concentrated.

Just then, the telliebell rang and Tim, being youngest, went to answer it. When he came back, he was smiling. "For you, Sylvie. Lennie."

"Lennie!" Sylvia yelped joyously. She ran toward the tellie, dashed back, planted a wet kiss on my cheek, and scurried off to the booth.

"Well, gosh!" Danny said.

"Maybe it's going to be all right," Tim said, precognizing hard. "Power doesn't necessarily corrupt."

"You could make that part of your service, Kev," Danny suggested. "Mending broken hearts, I mean, not corrupting. Hey, where are you going?"

"To catch a helibus," I said. "There's a broken heart that needs fixing immediately. And it's for me, so nothing for nothing still goes."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK OF NO TRADES ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the

phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project

Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any)

you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations

from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.